GABRIEL TOLLIVER

BY

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

Harris

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GABRIEL TOLLIVER

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A Story of Reconstruction

By

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

Author of
"Uncle Remus," "The Making of a Statesman," etc.

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To

James Whitcomb Riley

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GABRIEL TOLLIVER

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Prelude

"CEPHAS! here is a letter for you, and it is from Shady Dale! I know you will be happy now."

For several years Sophia had listened calmly to my glowing descriptions of Shady Dale and the people there. She was patient, but I could see by the way she sometimes raised her eyebrows that she was a trifle suspicious of my judgment, and that she thought my opinions were unduly coloured by my feelings. Once she went so far as to suggest that I was all the time looking at the home people through the eyes of boyhood—eyes that do not always see accurately. She had said, moreover, that if I were to return to Shady Dale, I would find that the friends of my boyhood were in no way different from the people I meet every day. This was absurd, of course—or, rather, it would have been absurd for any one else to make the suggestion; for at that particular time, Sophia was a trifle jealous of Shady Dale and its people. Nevertheless, she was really patient. You know how exasperating a man can be when he has a hobby. Well, my hobby was Shady Dale, and I was not ashamed of it. The man or woman who cannot display as much of the homing in-

stinct as a cat or a pigeon is a creature to be pitied or despised. Sophia herself was a tramp, as she often said. She was born in a little suburban town in New York State, but never lived there long enough to know what home was. She went to Albany, then to Canada, and finally to Georgia; so that the only real home she ever knew is the one she made herself—out of the raw material, as one might say.

Well, she came running with the letter, for she is still active, though a little past the prime of her youth. I returned the missive to her with a faint show of dignity. "The letter is for you," I said. She looked at the address more carefully, and agreed with me. "What in the world have I done," she remarked, "to receive a letter from Shady Dale?"

"Why, it is the simplest thing in the world," I replied. "You have been fortunate enough to marry me."

"Oh, I see!" she cried, dropping me a little curtsey; "and I thank you kindly!"

The letter was from an old friend of mine—a schoolmate—and it was an invitation to Sophia, begging her to take a day off, as the saying is, and spend it in Shady Dale.

"Your children," the letter said, "will be glad to visit their father's old home, and I doubt not we can make it interesting for the wife." The letter closed with some prettily turned compliments which rather caught Sophia. But her suspicions were still in full play.

"I know the invitation is sent on your account, and not on mine," she said, holding the letter at arm's length.

"Well, why not? If my old friend loves me well enough to be anxious to give my wife and children pleasure, what is there wrong about that?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Sophia. "I've a great mind to go."

"If you do, my dear, you will make a number of people happy—yourself and the children, and many of my old friends."

"He declares," said Sophia, "that he writes at the request of his wife. You know how much of that to believe."

"I certainly do. Imagine me, for instance, inviting to visit us a lady whom you had never met."

Whereupon Sophia laughed. "I believe you'd endorse any proposition that came from Shady Dale," she declared.

She accepted the invitation more out of curiosity than with any expectation of enjoying herself; but she stayed longer than she had intended; and when she came back her views and feelings had undergone a complete change. "Cephas, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for not going to see those people," she declared. "Why, they are the salt of the earth. I never expected to be treated as they treated me. If it wasn't for your business, I would beg you to go back there and live. They are just like the people you read about in the books—I mean the good people, the ideal char-

acters—the men and women you would like to meet." Here she paused and sighed. "Oh, I wouldn't have missed that visit for anything. But what amazes me, Cephas, is that you've never put in your books characters such as you find in Shady Dale."

The suggestion was a fertile one; it had in it the active principle of a germ; and it was not long before the ferment began to make itself felt. The past began to renew itself; the sun shone on the old days and gave them an illumination which they lacked when they were new. Time's perspective gave them a mellower tone, and they possessed, at least for me, that element of mystery which seems to attach to whatever is venerable. It was as if the place, the people, and the scenes had taken the shape of a huge picture, with just such a lack of harmony and unity as we find in real life.

Let those who can do so continue to import harmony and unity into their fabrications and call it art. Whether it be art or artificiality, the trick is beyond my powers. I can only deal with things as they were; on many occasions they were far from what I would have had them to be; but as I was powerless to change them, so am I powerless to twist individuals and events to suit the demands or necessities of what is called art.

Such a feat might be possible if I were to tell the simple story of Nan and Gabriel and Tasma Tid during the days when they roamed over the old Bermuda hills, and gazed, as it were, into the worlds that existed only in their dreams: for then the story would be both fine and beautiful. It would be a wonderful

romance indeed, with just a touch of tragic mystery, gathered from the fragmentary history of Tasma Tid, a child-woman from the heart of Africa, who had formed a part of the cargo of the yacht *Wanderer*, which landed three hundred slaves on the coast of Georgia in the last months of 1858. You may find the particulars of the case of the *Wanderer* in the files of the Savannah newspapers, and in the records of the United States Court for that district; but the tragic history of Tasma Tid can be found neither in the newspapers nor in the court records.

But for this one touch of mystery and tragedy, this chronicle, supposing it to deal only with the childhood and early youth of Nan and Gabriel, would resolve itself into a marvellous fairy tale, made up of the innocent dreams and hopes and beliefs, and all the extraordinary inventions and imaginings of childhood. And even mystery and tragedy have their own particular forms of simplicity, so that, with Tasma Tid in the background the tale would be artless enough to satisfy the most artful. For, even if the reader, seated on the magic cloak of some competent story-teller, were transported to the heart of Africa, where the mountains, with their feet in the jungle, reach up and touch the moon, or to China, or the Islands of the Sea, the hero of the tale would be the same. His name is Dilly Bal, and he carries on his operations wherever there are stars in the sky. He is a restless and a roving creature, flitting to and fro between all points of the compass.

When King Sun crawls into his trundle bed and

begins to snore, Dilly Bal creeps forth from Somewhere, or maybe from Nowhere, which is just on the other side, fetching with him a long broom, which he swishes about to such purpose that the katydids hear it and are frightened. They hide under the leaves and are heard no more that night. That is why you never hear them crying and disputing when you chance to be awake after midnight.

But Dilly Bal knows nothing of the katydids; he has his own duties to perform, and his own affairs to attend to; and these, as you will presently see, are very pressing. It is his business, as well as his pleasure, to be the Housekeeper of the Sky, which he dusts and tidies and puts in order. It is a part of his duty to see that the stars are safely bestowed against the moment when old King Sun shall emerge from his tent, and begin his march over the world. And then, in the dusk of the evening, Dilly Bal must take each star from the bag in which he carries it, polish it bright, and put it in its proper place.

Sometimes, as you may have observed, a star will fall while Dilly Bal is handling it. This happens when he is nervous for fear that King Sun, instead of going to bed in his tent, has crept back and is watching from behind the cloud mountains. Sometimes a star falls quite by accident, as when Lucindy or Patience drops a plate in the kitchen. You will be sure to know Dilly Bal when you see him, for, in handling the stars and dusting the sky, his clothes get full of yellow cobwebs, which he never bothers himself to brush off.

But Dilly Bal's most difficult job is with the Moon. Regularly the Moon blackens her face in a vain effort to hide from King Sun. If she used smut or soot, Dilly Bal's task would not be so difficult; but she has found a lake of pitch somewhere in Africa, and in this lake she smears her face till it is so black her best friends wouldn't know her. The pitch is such sticky stuff that it is days and days before it can be rubbed off. The truth is, Dilly Bal never does succeed in getting all the pitch off. At her brightest, the Moon shows signs of it. So said Tasma Tid, and so we all firmly believed.

Yes, indeed! If this chronicle could be confined to the childhood and youth of those children, Dilly Bal would be the hero first and last. He was so real to all of us that we used to wander out to the old Bermuda fields almost every fine afternoon, and sit there until the light had faded from the sky, watching Dilly Bal hanging the stars on their pegs. The Evening Star was such a large and heavy one that Dilly Bal always replaced it before dark, so as to be sure not to drop it.

Once when we stayed out in the Bermuda fields later than usual, a big star fell from its place, and went flying across the sky, leaving a long and brilliant streamer behind it. At first, Nan thought that Dilly Bal had tried to hang the Evening Star on the wrong peg, but when she looked in the west, there was the big star winking at her and at all of us as hard as it could.

The pity of it was that Nan and Gabriel, and all their young friends, had finally to come in contact

with the hard practical affairs of the world. As for Tasma Tid, contact had no special influence on her. She was to all appearance as unchangeable as the pyramids, and as mysterious as the Sphinx. But it was different with Nan and Gabriel, and, indeed, with all the rest. Their story soon ceased to be a simple one. In some directions, it appeared to be a hopeless tangle, catching a great many other persons in its loops and meshes; so that, instead of a simple, entrancing story, all aglow with the glamour of romance, they had troubles that were grievous, and their full share of dulness and tediousness, which are the essential ingredients of everyday life.

After all, it is perhaps fortunate that the marvellous dreams of Nan and Gabriel, and the quaint imaginings of Tasma Tid are not to be chronicled. The spinning of this glistening gossamer once begun would have no end, for Nan was an expert dreamer both night and day, and in the practice of this art, Gabriel was not far behind her; while Tasma Tid, who was Nan's maid and bodyguard, could frame her face in her hands, and tell you stories from sunrise to sundown and far into the night.

Tasma Tid, though she was only a child in stature and nature, was grownер in years, as she said, than some of the grownest grown folks that they knew. She was a dwarf by race, and always denied bitterly, sometimes venomously, that she was a negro, declaring that in her country the people were always at war with the blacks. Her color was dark brown, light enough for

the blood tints to show in her face, and her hair was straight and glossy black. From the *Wanderer*, she soon found herself in the slave market at Malvern, and there she fell under the eye of Dr. Randolph Dorrington, Nan's father, who bought her forthwith. He thought that a live doll would please his daughter. The dwarf said that her name was Tasma Tid in her country, and she would answer to no other.

It was a very fortunate bargain all around, especially for Nan, for in the African woman she found both a playmate and a protector. Tasma Tid was far above the average negro in intelligence, in courage and in cunning. She was as obstinate as a mule, and no matter what obstacles were thrown in her way, her own desires always prevailed in the end, a fact that will explain her early appearance in the slave market. Those of her owners who failed to understand her were not willing to see her spoil on their hands, like a barrel of potatoes or a basket of shrimps. The African was uncanny when she chose to be, outspoken, vicious, and tender-hearted, her nature being compounded of the same qualities and contradictions as those which belong to the great ladies of the earth, who, with opportunity always at their elbows, have contrived to create a great stir in the world.

When Dr. Dorrington fetched Tasma Tid home, he called out to Nan from his gig: "I have brought you a live doll, daughter; come and see how you like it."

Nan went running—she never learned how to walk until she was several years older—and regarded Tasma

Tid with both surprise and sympathy. The African, seeing only the sympathy, leaped from the gig, seized Nan around the waist, lifted her from the ground, ran this way and that, and then released her with a loud and joyous laugh.

"What do you mean by that?" cried Nan, somewhat taken aback.

"She stan' fer we howdy," the African answered.

"Well, let's see you tell popsy howdy," suggested Nan, indicating her father.

"Uh-uh! he we buckra."

From that hour Tasma Tid attached herself to Nan, following her everywhere with the unquestioning fidelity of a dog. She sat on the floor of the dining-room while Nan ate her meals, and slept on a pallet by the child's bed at night. If the African was sweeping the yard, a task she sometimes consented to perform, she would fling the brushbroom away and go with Nan if the child started out at the gate. At first this constant attendance was somewhat annoying to Nan, for she was an independent lass; but presently, when she found that Tasma Tid was a most accomplished and versatile playfellow, as well as the depositary of hundreds of curious fables and quaint tales of the wildwood, Nan's irritation disappeared.

As for Gabriel—Gabriel Tolliver—he was almost as indispensable as the African woman. Children learn a good many things, as they grow older, and I have heard that Nan and Gabriel were thought to be queer, and that all who were much in their company were also

thought to be queer. No one knows why. It was a simple statement, and simple statements are readily believed, because no one takes the trouble to inquire into them. A man who has views different from those of the majority is called eccentric; if he insists on promulgating them, he is known as a crank. In the case of Nan and Gabriel, it may be said by one who knows, that, while they were different from the majority of children, they were neither queer nor eccentric.

They, and those whom they chose as companions, were children at a time when the demoralisation of war was about to begin—when it was already casting its long shadow before it—and when their elders were discussing as hard as ever they could the questions of State rights, the true interpretation of the Constitution, squatter sovereignty, the right of secession—every question, in short, except the one at issue. In this way, and for this reason, the two children and their companions were thrown back upon themselves.

Of those who formed this merry little company, not one went to the academies that had been established in the town early enough to be its most ancient institutions. Nan was taught by her father, Randolph Dorrington, and Gabriel and I said our lessons to his grandmother, Mrs. Lucy Lumsden. Thus it happened that we were through with our school tasks before the children in the two academies had begun their morning recess.

"We would never have been such good friends," said Nan on one occasion, "if I hadn't wanted to go to your

house, Gabriel, to see how your grandmother wavies her hair. I saw Cephas, and asked him to go along with me." Child as she was, Nan had her little vanities. She desired above all things that her hair should fall away from her brow in little rippling waves, like those that shone in the silver-grey hair of Gabriel's grandmother.

"Why, my grandmother doesn't wavie her hair at all," protested Gabriel.

"Of course not," replied Nan, with a toss of the hand; "I found that out for myself. And I was very sorry; I want my hair to wavie like hers and yours."

"Well, if your hair was to wavie like mine," said Gabriel, "you'd have a mighty hard time combing it in the morning."

"Don't you remember," Nan went on in a reminiscent way, "that she made you shake hands with me that day? It was funny the way you came up and held out your arm. If I had jumped at you and said *Boo!* I don't know what would have happened." Gabriel grew very red at this, but Nan ignored his embarrassment. "You had syrup on your fingers, you know, and then we all had some in a saucer. Yes, and we all sopped our bread in the same saucer, and Cephas here got the syrup on his face and in his hair."

It never occurred to me in those days that Nan was beautiful, or that Gabriel was handsome, but looking back in the light of experience, it is easy to remember that they had in their features all the promises that the long and slow-moving years were to fulfil. I was struck, however, by one peculiarity of Nan's face. When

her countenance was at rest, it gave out a hint of melancholy, and there was an appealing look in her brown eyes; but when she smiled or laughed, the sombre face broke up into numberless dimples. Apart from her countenance, there was a charm about her which I have never been able to trace to its source, and which of course is beyond description; and this charm remained, and made itself felt whether the appearance of melancholy had its dwelling-place in her eyes, which were large, and lustrous, and full of tenderness, or whether her face was brilliant with smiles. She had a deserved reputation as a tomboy, but she carried off her tricksy whims with a daintiness that preserved them from all hint of coarseness; and if sometimes she was rude, she had a way of righting herself that none could resist.

As for Gabriel, he was always large for his age. He was strong and healthy, possessing every physical excuse for roughness and boisterousness; but association with his grandmother, who was one of the gentlest of gentlewomen, had toned him down and smoothed the rough edges. His hair was dark and curly, and his face gave promise of great strength of character—a promise which, it may be said here, was fulfilled to the letter. He was as whimsical as Nan, and, in addition, had moods to which she was a stranger.

These things did not occur to Cephas the Child, but are the fruits of his memory and experience. He only knew at that time that Nan and Gabriel were both very good to him. He was considerably younger than either of them, and he often wondered then, and has wondered

since, why they were such good friends of his, and why they were constantly hunting him up if he failed to make his appearance. Perhaps because he was so full of unadulterated mischief. Gabriel, with all his gravity, was full of a quaint humour, and Nan hunted for cause for laughter in everything; and she was never more beautiful than when this same laughter had shaken her tawny hair about her face.

We had travelled widely. Nan had been to Malvern with her father, and had seen sights—railway trains, omilybuses, as she called them, a great big hotel, and "oodles" of crippled persons; yes, and besides the crippled persons, there was a blind man standing on the corner with a big card hanging from his neck; and that very day, she had eaten "reesins" until she never wanted 'em any more, as she said. Gabriel and Cephas had not gone so far; but once upon a time, they went to Halcyondale, and, among other things, had seen Major Tomlin Perdue kill sparrows with a pistol. Nan had been anxious to go with them at the time, but when she heard about the slaughter of the sparrows, she was very glad she had stayed at home, for what did a grown man as old as Major Perdue want to kill the poor little brown sparrows for? Nan's question was never answered. Gabriel and Cephas had only seen in the transaction the enviable skill of the Major; whereas Nan thought of nothing but the poor little birds that had been slain for a holiday show. "They may have been singing sparrows, or snow-birds," mourned Nan. True enough; but Gabriel and Cephas had thought of

nothing but the skill of the marksman with his duelling pistols. Tasma Tid also had her point of view. "Wey you no fetcha dem lil bud home fer we supper?" She was hardly satisfied when she was told that the little birds, all put together, would have made hardly more than a mouthful.

CHAPTER ONE

Kettledrum and Fife

THE serene repose of Shady Dale no doubt stood for dulness and lack of progress in that day and time. In all ages of the world, and in all places, there are men of restless but superficial minds, who mistake repose and serenity for stagnation. No doubt then, as now, the most awful sentence to be passed on a community was to say that it was not progressive. But when you examine into the matter, what is called progress is nothing more nor less than the multiplication of the resources of those who, by means of dicker and barter, are trying all the time to overreach the public and their fellows, in one way and another. This sort of thing now has a double name; it is called civilisation, as well as progress, and those who take things as they find them in their morning newspaper, without going to the trouble to reflect for themselves, are no doubt duly impressed by terms that are large enough to fill both the ear and mouth at one and the same time.

Well, whatever serene repose stands for, Shady Dale possessed it in an eminent degree, and the people there had their full share of the sorrows and troubles of this

world, as Madame Awtry, or Miss Puella Gillum, or Neighbour Tomlin, or even that cheerful philosopher, Mr. Billy Sanders, could have told you; but of these Nan and Gabriel and Cephas knew nothing except in a vague, indefinite way. They heard hints of rumours, and sometimes they saw their elders shaking their heads as they gossiped together, but the youngsters lived in a world of their own, a world apart, and the vague rumours were no more interesting to them than the reports of canals on Mars are to the average person today. He reads in his newspaper that the markings in Mars are supposed to be canals; whereat he smiles and reflects that these canals can do him no harm. Nan and Gabriel and Cephas were as far from contemporary troubles as we are from Mars. The most serious trouble they had was not greater than that which they discovered one day on the Bermuda hill. As they were sitting on the warm grass, wondering how long before peaches would be ripe, they saw a field mouse cutting up some queer capers. Nan was not very friendly with mice, and she instinctively gathered up her skirts; but she did not run; her curiosity was ever greater than her fear. Presently we found that the troubles of Mother Mouse were very real. A tremendous black beetle had invaded her nest, and had seized one of her children, a little bit of a thing, naked and red and about the size of a half-ripe mulberry. We tried hard to rescue the mouse from the beetle, but soon found that it was quite dead. Cephas crushed the beetle, which was as venomous-looking a bug as they had ever seen. Was the

beetle preparing to eat the mouse? Tasma Tid said yes, but Gabriel thought not. His idea was that the Mother Mouse had attacked the beetle, which was blindly crawling about, and had fallen in the nest accidentally. The beetle, striving to defend itself, had seized the mouse between its pinchers, and held it there until it was quite dead.

But the Bermuda fields were not the only resource of the children. There were seasons when Uncle Plato, who was Meriwether Clopton's carriage-driver, came to town with the big waggon to haul home the supplies necessary for the plantation; loads of bagging and rope; cases of brogan shoes, and hats for the negroes; and bales on bales of osnaburgs and blankets. The appearance of the Clopton waggon on the public square was hailed by these youngsters with delight. They always made a rush for it, and, in riding back and forth with Uncle Plato, they spent some of the most delightful moments of their lives.

And then in the fall season, there was the big gin running at the Clopton place, with old Beck, the blind mule, going round and round, turning the cogged and pivoted post that set the machinery in motion. But the youngsters rarely grew tired of riding back and forth with Uncle Plato. He was the one person in the world who catered most completely to their whims, who was most responsive to their budding and eager fancies, and who entered most enthusiastically into the regions created and peopled by Nan's skittish and fantastic imagination.

These children had their critics, as may well be supposed, especially Nan, who did not always conform to the rules and theories which have been set up for the guidance of girls; but Uncle Plato, along with Gabriel and Cephas, accepted her as she was, with all her faults, and took as much delight in her tricksy and capricious behaviour, as if he were responsible for it all. She and her companions furnished Uncle Plato with what all story-tellers have most desired since hairy man began to shave himself with pumice-stone, and squat around a common hearth—a faithful and believing audience. Uncle Æsop, it may be, cared less for his audience than for the opportunity of lugging in a dismal and perfunctory moral. Uncle Plato, like Uncle Remus, concealed his behind text and adventure, conveying it none the less completely on that account. Not one of his vagaries was too wild for the acceptance of his small audience, and the elusiveness of his methods was a perpetual delight to Nan, as hers was to Uncle Plato, though he sometimes shook his head, and pretended to sigh over her innocent evasions.

Once when we were all riding back and forth from the Clopton Place to Shady Dale, Nan asked Uncle Plato if he could spell.

"Tooby sho I kin, honey. What you reckon I been doin' all deze long-come-shorts ef I dunner how ter spell? How you speck I kin git 'long, haulin' an' maulin', ef I dunner how ter spell? Why, I could spell long 'fo' I know'd my own name."

"Long-come-shorts, what are they?" asked Nan.

"Rainy days an' windy nights," responded Uncle Plato, throwing his head back, and closing his eyes.

"Let's hear you spell, then," said Nan.

"Dee-o-egg, dog," was the prompt response. Nan looked at Uncle Plato to see if he was joking, but he was solemnity itself. "E-double-egg, egg!" he continued.

"Now spell John A. Murrell," said Nan. Murrell, the land pirate, was one of her favourite heroes at this time.

Uncle Plato pretended to be very much shocked. "Why, honey, dat man wuz rank pizen. En spozen he wa'nt, how you speck me ter spell sump'n er somebody which I ain't never laid eyes on? How I gwineter spell Johnny Murrell, an' him done dead dis many a long year ago?"

"Well, spell goose, then," said Nan, seeing a flock of geese marching stiffly in single file across a field near the road.

Uncle Plato looked at them carefully enough to take their measure, and then shook his head solemnly. "Deyer so many un um, honey, dey'd be monstus hard fer ter spell."

"Well, just spell one of them then," Nan suggested.

"Which un, honey?"

"Any one you choose."

Uncle Plato studied over the matter a moment, and again shook his head. "Uh-uh, honey; dat ain't nigh gwine ter do. Ef you speck me fer ter spell goose, you got ter pick out de one you want me ter spell."

"Well, spell the one behind all the rest."

Again Uncle Plato shook his head. "Dat ar goose got half-grown goslin's, an' I ain't never larnt how ter spell goose wid half-grown goslin's. You ax too much, honey."

"Then spell the one next to head." Nan was inexorable.

"Dat ar ain't no goose," replied Uncle Plato, with an air of triumph; "she's a gander."

"I don't believe you know how to spell goose," said Nan, with something like scorn.

"Don't you fool yo'se'f, honey," remarked Uncle Plato in a tone of confidence. "You git me a great big fat un, not too ol', an' not too young, an' fill 'er full er stuffin', an' bake 'er brown in de big oven, an' save all de drippin's, an' put 'er on de table not fur fum whar I mought be settin' at, an' gi' me a pone er corn bread, an' don't have no talkin' an' laughin' in de game—an' ef I don't spell dat goose, I'll come mighty nigh it, I sholy will. Ef I don't spell 'er, dey won't be nuff lef' fer de nex' man ter spell. You kin 'pen' on dat, honey."

Nan suddenly called Uncle Plato's attention to the carriage horses, which were hitched to the waggon. She said she knew their names well enough when they were pulling the carriage, but now—

"Haven't you changed the horses, Uncle Plato?" she asked.

"How I gwine change um, honey?"

"I mean, haven't you changed their places?"

"No, ma'am!" he answered with considerable em-

phasis. "No, ma'am; ef I wuz ter put dat off hoss in de lead, you'd see some mighty high kickin'; you sho would."

"Oh, let's try it!" cried Nan, with real eagerness.

"Dem may try it what choosen ter try it," responded Uncle Plato, dryly, "but I'll ax um fer ter kindly le' me git win' er what deyer gwine ter do, an' den I'll make my 'rangerments fer ter be somers out'n sight an' hearin'."

"Well, if you haven't made the horses swap places," remarked Nan, "I'll bet you a thrip that the right-hand horse is named Waffles, and the left-hand one Battercakes."

At once Uncle Plato became very dignified. "Well-'um, I'm mighty glad fer ter hear you sesso, kaze ef dey's any one thing what I want mo' dan anudder, it's a thrip's wuff er mannyfac terbacker. Ez fer de off hoss, dat's his name—Waffles—you sho called it right. But when it comes ter de lead hoss, anybody on de plantation, er off'n it, I don't keer whar dey live at, ef dey yever so much ez hear er dat lead hoss, will be glad fer ter tell you dat he goes by de name er Muffins." He held out his hand for the thrip.

"Well, what is the difference?" said Nan, drawing back as if to prevent him from taking the thrip.

"De diffunce er what?" inquired Uncle Plato.

"And you expect me to give you money you haven't won," declared Nan. "What's the difference between Battercakes and Muffins? A muffin is a battercake if you pour three big spoonfuls in a pan and spread it

out, and a battercake is a muffin if you pen it up in a tin-thing like a napkin ring. Anybody can tell you that, Uncle Plato—yes, anybody."

What reply the old negro would have made to this bit of home-made casuistry will never be known. That it would have been reasonable, if not entirely adequate, may well be supposed, but just as he had given his head a preliminary shake, the rattle of a kettledrum was heard, and above the rattle a fife was shrilling.

The shrilling fife, and the roll and rattle of the drums! These were sounds somewhat new to Shady Dale in 1860; but presently they were to be heard all over the land.

"I can see dem niggers right now!" exclaimed Uncle Plato, as we hustled out of his waggon. "Riley playin' de fife, Green beatin' on de kittledrum, an' Ike Varner bangin' on de big drum. Ef de white folks pay much 'tention ter dem niggers, dey won't be no livin' in de same county wid um. But dey better not come struttin' 'roun' me!"

The drums were beating the signal for calling together the men whose names had been signed to the roll of a company to be called the Shady Dale Scouts, and the meeting was for the purpose of organizing and electing officers. All this was accomplished in due time; but meanwhile Nan and Gabriel and Cephas, as well as Tasma Tid and all the rest of the children in the town, went tagging after the fife and drums listening to Riley play the beautiful marching tunes that

set Nan's blood to tingling. Riley was a master hand with the fife, and we had never known it, had never even suspected it! Nan thought it was very mean in Riley not to tell somebody that he could play so beautifully.

Well, in a very short time, the company was rigged out in the finest uniforms the children had even seen. All the men, even the privates, had plumes in their hats and epaulettes of gold on their shoulders; and on their coats they wore stripes of glowing red, and shiny brass buttons without number. And at least twice a week they marched through the streets and out into the Bermuda fields, where they had their drilling grounds. These were glorious days for the youngsters. Nan was so enthusiastic that she organised a company of little negroes, and insisted on being the captain. Gabriel was the first lieutenant, and Cephas was the second. When the company was ready to take the field, it was discovered that Nan would also have to be orderly sergeant and color-bearer. But she took on herself the duties and responsibilities of these positions without a murmur. She wore a paper hat of the true Napoleonic cut, and carried in one hand her famous sword-gun, and the colors in the other. The oldest private in Nan's company was nine; the youngest was four, and had as much as he could do to keep up with the rest. The uniforms of these sun-seasoned troops was the regulation plantation fatigue dress—a shirt coming to the knees. Two or three of the smaller privates had evidently fallen victims to the pot-liquor

and buttermilk habits, for their bellies stuck out black and glistening from rents in their shirts.

Their accoutrements prefigured in an absurd way the resources of the Confederacy at a later date. They were armed with broomsticks, and what-not. The file-leader had an old pair of tongs, which he snapped viciously when Nan gave the word to fire. The famous sword-gun, with which Nan did such execution, had once seen service as an umbrella handle.

One afternoon, as Nan was drilling her troops, she chanced to glance down the road, and saw a waggon coming along. Deploying her company across the highway, she went forward in person to reconnoitre. She soon discovered that the waggon was driven by Uncle Plato. Running back to her veterans, she placed herself in front of them, and calmly awaited events. Slowly the fat horses dragged the waggon along, when suddenly Nan cried "Halt!" whereupon the drummer, obeying previous instructions, began to belabour his tin-pan, while Nan levelled her famous sword-gun at Uncle Plato. "Bang!" she exclaimed, and then, "Why didn't you fall off the waggon?" she cried, as Uncle Plato remained immovable. "Why, you don't know any more about real war than a baby," she said scornfully.

If the truth must be told, Uncle Plato had been dozing, and when he awoke he viewed the scene before him with astonishment. There was no need to cry "Halt!" or exclaim "Bang!" for as soon as the drummer began to beat his tin-pan, the horses stood

still and craned their necks forward, with a warning snort, trying to see what this strange and unnatural proceeding meant. Uncle Plato had involuntarily tightened the reins when he was so rudely awakened, and the horses took this for a hint that they must avoid the danger, and, as the shortest way is the best way, they began to back, and had the waggon nearly turned around before Uncle Plato could tell them a different tale.

"Ef I'd 'a' fell out'n de waggon, honey, who gwine ter pick me up?" he asked, laughing.

"Why, no one is picked up in war!"

"Is dis war, honey?"

"Of course it is," Nan declared.

"Does bofe sides hafter take part in de rucus?" asked Uncle Plato, making a terrible face at the little negroes.

"Why, of course," said Nan.

Seeing the scowl, Nan's veteran troops began to edge slowly toward the nearest breach in the fence. Uncle Plato seized his whip and pretended to be clambering from the waggon. At this a panic ensued, and Nan's army dispersed in a jiffy. The seasoned troops dropped their arms and fled. The four-year-old became lost or entangled in a thick growth of jimson weed, seeing which, Uncle Plato cried out in terrible voice, "Ketch um dar! Fetch um here!"

Then and there ensued a wild scene of demoralisation and anarchy; loud shrieks and screams filled the air; the dogs barked, the hens cackled, and the neigh-

bours began to put their heads out of the windows. Mrs. Absalom, who had charge of the Dorrington household, and who had raised Nan from a baby, came to the door—the defeat of the troops occurred right at Nan's own home—crying, "My goodness gracious! has the yeth caved in?" Then, seeing the waggon crosswise the road, and mistaking Nan's shrieks of laughter for cries of pain, she bolted from the house with a white face.

Mrs. Absalom's reactions from her daily alarms about Nan usually resulted in bringing her into open and direct war with everybody in sight or hearing, except the child; but on this occasion, her fright had been so serious that when Nan, somewhat sobered, ran to her the good woman was shaking.

"Why, Nonny!" cried Nan, hugging her, "you are all trembling."

"No wonder," said Mrs. Absalom in a subdued voice; "I saw you under them waggon wheels as plain as I ever saw anything in my life. I'm gittin' old, I reckon."

And yet there were some people who wondered how Nan could endure such a foster-mother as Mrs. Absalom.

But the complete rout of Nan's army made no change in the general complexion of affairs. The Shady Dale Scouts continued to perfect themselves in the tactics of war, and after awhile, when the great controversy began to warm up—the children paid no attention to the passage of time—the company went into camp. This was a great hour for the youngsters. Here at last was

something real and tangible. The marching and the countermarching through the streets and in the old field were very well in their way, but Nan and Gabriel and the rest had grown used to these manœuvres, and they longed for something new. This was furnished by the camp, with its white tents, and the grim sentinels pacing up and down with fixed bayonets. No one, not even an officer, could pass the sentinels without giving the password, or calling for the officer of the guard.

All this, from the children's point of view, was genuine war; but to the members of the company it was a veritable picnic. The citizens of the town, especially the ladies, sent out waggon loads of food every day—boiled ham, barbecued shote, chicken pies, and cake; yes, and pickles. Nan declared she didn't know there were as many pickles in the world, as she saw unloaded at the camp.

Mr. Goodlett, who was Mrs. Absalom's husband, went out to the camp, looked it over with the eye of an expert, and turned away with a groan. This citizen had served both in the Mexican and the Florida wars, and he knew that these gallant young men would have a rude awakening, when it came to the real tug of war.

"Doesn't it look like war, Mr. Ab?" Nan asked, running after the veteran.

Mr. Goodlett looked at the bright face lifted up to his, and frowned, though a smile of pity showed itself around his grizzled mouth. He was a very deliberate man, and he hesitated before he spoke. "You think that looks like war?" he asked.

"Why, of course. Isn't that the way they do when there's a war?"

"What! gormandise, an' set in the shade? Why, it ain't no more like war than sparrergrass is like jimson weed—not one ioter." With that, he sighed and went on his way.

But when did the precepts of age and experience ever succeed in chilling the enthusiasm of youth? With the children, it was "O to be a soldier boy!" and Nan and her companions continued to linger around the edges of the spectacle, taking it all in, and enjoying every moment. And the Scouts themselves continued to live like lords, eating and drilling, and dozing during the day, and at night dancing to the sweet music of Flavian Dion's violin. Nan and Gabriel thought it was fine, and, as well as can be remembered, Cephas was of the same opinion. As for Tasma Tid, she thought that the fife and drums, and the general glare and glitter of the affair were simply grand, very much nicer than war in her country, where the Arab slave-traders crept up in the night and seized all who failed to escape in the forest, killing right and left for the mere love of killing. Compared with the jungle war, this pageant was something to be admired.

And many of the older citizens held views not very different from those of the children, for enthusiasm ran high. The Shady Dale Scouts went away arrayed in their holiday uniforms. Many of them never returned to their homes again, but those that did were arrayed in rags and tatters. Their gallantry was such that

the Shady Dale Scouts, disguised as Company B, were always at the head of their regiment when trouble was on hand. But all this is to anticipate.

CHAPTER TWO

A Town with a History

BEFORE, during, and after the war, Shady Dale presented always the same aspect of serene repose. It was, as you may say, a town with a history. Then, as now, there were towns all about that had no such fortunate appendage behind them to explain their origin. No one could tell what they were begun for; no one could say whether they had for their nucleus an old field or a cross-roads grocery, or whether a party of immigrants pitched their tents there because the grass was fine and the water abundant. There is one city in Georgia, and it is the most prosperous of all, that was built on the idea that the cattle-paths and the old government roads afford the most convenient and picturesque contours for the streets; and to this day, the thoroughfares of that city afford a most interesting study to those who are interested in either topography or human nature; for it is possible to go to that city, and, with half an eye, discover the places where the waggons and other vehicles turned aside nearly a hundred years ago to avoid the mudholes, the fallen trees, and other temporary obstructions. They have been preserved in the conformation of the streets.

Shady Dale is no city, and it may be that its public-spirited citizens stretch the meaning of the term when they call it a town. Nevertheless, the community has a well-defined history. When Raleigh Clopton, shortly after the signing of the treaty of peace between the United States and Great Britain, crossed the Oconee, and settled on the lands of the hostile Creeks, his friends declared that he was tempting Providence; and so it seemed; but the event proved that from first to last, his adventure was under the direct guidance of Providence. He demonstrated anew the truth of two ancient maxims: he who risks nothing, gains nothing; heaven helps those who help themselves. Raleigh Clopton risked everything and gained the most beautiful domain in all the land. He had, indeed, one stormy interview with General McGillivray, the great Creek chief and statesman, but after that all was peace and prosperity.

General McGillivray was one of the most remarkable men of his time, and his time was during an era of remarkable men. He possessed a genius that enabled him to cope successfully with the ablest statesmen of his day. He drew Washington into a secret treaty with the Creek Nation, and when McGillivray died, the Father of his country referred to him as "my friend," and deplored his taking off. Courageous and adventurous himself, McGillivray was no doubt attracted by the attitude and personality of the fearless Virginian. He became the warm friend of Raleigh Clopton, and marked that friendship by deeding to the first white settler two thousand acres of land lying between the

Little River hills on one side, and the meadows of Murder Creek on the other. Moreover, he named the estate Shady Dale, and aided Raleigh Clopton to establish a trading-post where the court-house of the town now stands; and on a pine near by, he caused to be made the semblance of a broken arrow, a token that between the Creeks and the Master of Shady Dale a lasting peace had been established.

This was the beginning. When the multifarious and long-disputed treaties between the United States and the Creek Nation had been signed, and a general peace was assured, Raleigh Clopton communicated with his friends in Wilkes, Burke, Columbia and Richmond counties—the choice spirits who had fought by his side in the bloodiest battles of the War for Independence—informed them of his good fortune, and invited them to share it. The response was all that he could have desired. His old friends and comrades lost no time in joining him—the Dorringtons, the Tomlins, the Gaithers, the Awtrys, the Terrells, the Odoms, the Lumsdens, and, later, the friends and relatives of these. For the most part they were men of substance and character.

Well, perhaps not all. There are black sheep in every flock, and wherever the nature of Adam survives, there we may behold wisdom and folly dancing to the same tune, and sin and repentance occupying the same couch. So it has been from the first, and so it will be to the end. But, take them all in all, making due allowance for the tendencies of human nature, the men

and women who responded to the invitation of Raleigh Clopton may be described as the salt of the earth. They had all, women and men, been subjected to the trials and hardships of a war in which no quarter was asked or given; and their experiences had given them a strength of character, and a versatility in dealing with unexpected events, that could hardly be matched elsewhere. To each of those who responded to his invitation, Raleigh Clopton gave a part of his domain, and laid out their settlement for them.

This was the origin of Shady Dale. But to set forth its origin is not to describe its beauty, which is of a character that refuses to submit to description. You go down to the old town from the city, and you say to yourself and your friends that you are enjoying the delights of the country. You visit it from the plantations, and you feel that you are breathing the kind of atmosphere that should be found in the social life of a large, refined and perfectly homogeneous community. But whether you go there from the city, or from the plantations, you are inevitably impressed with a sense of the attractiveness of the place; you fall under the spell of the old town—it was old even in the old times of the sixties. And yet if you were called upon to define the nature of the spell, what could you say? What name could you give to the tremulous beauty that hovers about and around the place, when the fresh green leaves of the great trees are fluttering in the cool wind, and everything is touched and illumined by the tender colours of spring? Under what heading in the

catalogue of things would you place the vivid richness which animates the town and the landscape all around when the summer is at its height? And how could you describe the harmony that time has brought about between the fine old houses and the setting in which they are grouped?

All these things are elusive; they make themselves keenly felt, but they do not lend themselves to analysis.

It is a pity that those who are interested in traditions that are truer than history could not have all the facts in regard to Shady Dale from the lips of Mr. Obadiah Tutwiler, who had constituted himself the oral historian of the community. Mr. Tutwiler was alive as late as 1869, and had at his fingers'-ends all the essential facts relating to the origin and growth of the town, and he related the story with a fluency, an accuracy, and a relish quite surprising in so old a man.

As was fitting, the old court-house, the temple of justice, had been reared in the centre of the town, and the square that surrounds it took the shape of a park of considerable dimensions. On two sides were some of the more pretentious dwellings; the tavern, with a few of the more modest houses took up a third side; while the fourth side was taken up by the shops and stores; and so careful had the early settlers been with the trees, that it was possible to stand in a certain upper window of the court-house, and look out upon the town with not a house in sight.

Naturally, the most interesting feature of Shady Dale was the Clopton Place. It had been the home of

the First Settler, and in 1860, when Nan and Gabriel were enjoying their happiest days, it was owned and occupied by the son, Meriwether Clopton.

From the time of the First Settler, the Clopton Place had been dedicated and set apart to the uses of hospitality. The deed in which General McGillivray, in the name of the Creek Nation, conveyed the domain to Raleigh Clopton, distinctly sets forth the condition that the Clopton Place was to be an asylum and a place of refuge for the unfortunate and for those who needed succour. During the long and bloody contests between the white settlers and the Creeks, it was the pleasure of the Creek chief to pay out of his own private fortune, which was a large one for those days, the ransoms which, under the rules of the tribal organisations, each Indian town demanded for the prisoners captured by its warriors. Such was the poverty of the whites in general that only occasionally was General McGillivray reimbursed for his expenditures in this direction.

But no matter by whom the ransoms were paid, the prisoners were one and all forwarded to the Clopton Place, where they were cared for until such time as they could be transferred to the white settlements. In this way hospitality became a habit at the Place, and in the years that followed, no wayfarer was ever turned away from those wide doors.

In the pleasant weather, it was a familiar spectacle to see Meriwether Clopton sitting on the wide lawn, reading Virgil and Horace, two volumes of which he never tired. His favourite seat was in the shade of a

silver maple, through the branches of which a grape-vine had been trained. This silver maple, with the vine running through it, and the seat in the shade, were a realisation, he once told Gabriel and Cephas, of one of the most beautiful poems in one of the volumes, but whether Virgil or Horace, the aforesaid Cephas is unable to remember.

There were days long to be remembered when the Master of Clopton Place read aloud to the children, translating as he went along, and smacking his lips over the choice of words as though he were tasting a fine quality of wine. And the children felt the charm of these ancient verses; and they soon came to understand why words written down centuries ago, had power to take possession of the mind. They were charged with the qualities that brought them home to the modern hour; and for all that was foreign in them, they might have been composed at Shady Dale. It is no wonder that the common people in the Middle Ages clothed Virgil with the gift and power of a prophet or a magician.

Something of the charm that dwelt all about the place had its origin and centre in Meriwether Clopton himself. His years sat lightly upon him. He had led an active and a temperate life, and a hale and hearty old age was the fruit thereof. He had had his flings, and something more, perhaps, for there were traditions of some very serious troubles in which he had been engaged shortly after reaching his majority. But Gabriel's grandmother, who knew—none better—de-

clared that these troubles were not of Meriwether Clopton's seeking. They were the results of a legacy of feuds which Raleigh Clopton, through no desire of his own, had left to his son. It was said of Raleigh Clopton that his sense of justice was as strong as his temper, which was a stormy one. He espoused the cause of young Eli Whitney, who had been despoiled of his rights in the cotton-gin in Georgia, and this led him into a series of difficulties without parallel in the history of the State. Raleigh Clopton's attitude in this contest brought him in conflict with some of the most powerful men and interests in the commonwealth. It was a contest in which knavery, fraud and corruption, the courts, and considerable private capital, were all combined against Whitney, who appeared to be without a strong friend until Raleigh Clopton became his champion.

The collusion of the courts with this high-handed robbery was so ill-concealed that Raleigh Clopton soon discovered the fact, and his indignation rose to such a white heat that it drove him to excesses. He dragged one judge from a buggy, and plied him with a rawhide, he slapped the face of another in a public house, and posted a dozen prominent men as thieves and corruptionists, with the result that the State fairly swarmed with his enemies, men who were able to keep him busy in the way of troubles and difficulties. It was the day of private feuds, and it was not surprising that some of these enemies should attack the father through the son. Thus it fell out that Meriwether Clopton's ex-

perience for half a score of years after he came of age was anything but peaceful. But he came out of all these difficulties with head erect, clean hands and a clear conscience. He was neither hardened nor embittered by the violence with which he had to deal. On the contrary, his character was strengthened and his temper sweetened; so that when the lads who listened to his mellifluous translations from the Latin poets, were old enough to appreciate the qualities that go to make up a good man and an influential citizen, the fact dawned upon their minds that Meriwether Clopton was the finest gentleman they had ever seen.

CHAPTER THREE

The Return of Two Warriors

WHEN the great contest began, Nan was close to thirteen, and Gabriel was fourteen. Cephas was younger; he had lived hardly as many months as he had freckles on his face, otherwise he would have been an aged citizen. They wandered about together, always accompanied by Tasma Tid, all of them being children in every sense of the word. Occasionally they were joined by some of the other boys and girls; but they were always happier when they were left to themselves.

In the late afternoons they could always be found in the Bermuda fields, but at other times, especially on a warm day, their favourite playground was under the wide-spreading elms in front of the post-office. Amusing themselves there in the fine weather, they could see the people come and go, many of them looking for letters that never came. When the conflict at the front became warm and serious, and when the very newspapers, as Mrs. Absalom said, smelt of blood, there was always a large crowd of men, old and young, gathered at the post-office when the mail-coach came from Malvern. As few of the people subscribed for a daily newspaper, Judge Odom (he was Judge of the Inferior

Court, now called the Court of Ordinary) took upon himself to mount a chair or a dry-goods box, and read aloud the despatches printed in the Malvern *Recorder*. This enterprising journal had a number of volunteer correspondents at the front who made it a point to send with their letters the lists of the killed and wounded in the various Georgia regiments; and these lists grew ominously long as the days went by.

And then, in the course of time, came the collapse of the Confederacy, an event that blew away with a breath, as it were, the hopes and dreams of those who had undertaken to build a new government in the South; and this march of time brought about a gradual change in the relations between Nan and Gabriel. It was almost as imperceptible in its growth as the movement of the shadow on the sun-dial. Somehow, and to her great disgust, Nan awoke one morning and was told that she was a young woman, or dreamt that she was told. Anyhow, she realised, all of a sudden, that she was now too tall for short dresses, and too old to be playing with the boys as if she were one of them; and the consciousness of this change gave her many a bad quarter of an hour, and sometimes made her a trifle irritable; for, sweet as she was, she had a temper.

She asked herself a thousand times why she should now begin to feel shy of Gabriel, and why she should be so self-conscious, she who had never thought of herself with any degree of seriousness until now. It was all a puzzle to her. As it was with Nan, so it was with Gabriel. As Nan grew shy and shyer, so the

newly-awakened Gabriel grew more and more and more timid, and the two soon found themselves very far apart without knowing why. For a long time Cephas was the only connecting link between them. He was a sly little rascal, this same Cephas, and he found in the situation food for both curiosity and amusement. He had not the least notion why the two friends and comrades were inclined to avoid each other. He only knew that he was not having as pleasant a time as fell to his portion when they were all going about together with no serious notions of life or conduct.

Cephas got no satisfaction from either Nan or Gabriel when he asked them what the trouble was. Nan tried to explain matters, but her explanation was a very lame one. "I am getting old enough to be serious, Cephas; and I must begin to make myself useful. That's what Miss Polly Gaither says, and she's old enough to know. Oh, I hate it all!" said Nan.

"Is Miss Polly Gaither useful?" inquired Cephas.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Nan; "but that's what she told me, and then she held up her ear-trumpet for me to talk in it; but I just couldn't, she looked so very much in earnest. It was all I could do to keep from laughing. Did you ever notice, Cephas, how funny people are when they are really in earnest?"

Alas! Cephas had often pinched himself in Sunday-school to keep from laughing at old Mrs. Crafton, his teacher. She was so dreadfully in earnest that she kept her face in a pucker the whole time. Outside of the Sunday-school she was a very pleasant old lady.

Gabriel had no explanation to make whatever. He simply told Cephas that Nan was becoming vain. This Cephas denied with great emphasis, but Gabriel only shook his head and looked wise, as much as to say that he knew what he knew, and would continue to know it for some time to come. The truth is, however, that Gabriel was as ignorant of the feminine nature as it is possible for a young fellow to be; whereas, Nan, by means of the instinct or intuition which heaven has conferred on her sex for their protection, knew Gabriel a great deal better than she knew herself.

When the war came to a close, Gabriel was nearly eighteen, and Nan was seventeen, though she appeared to be a year or two younger. She was still childish in her ways and tastes, and carried with her an atmosphere of simplicity and sweetness in which very few girls of her age are fortunate enough to move. Simplicity was a part of her nature, though some of her young lady friends used to whisper to one another that it was all assumed. She was even referred to as Miss Prissy, a term that was probably intended to be an abbreviation of Priscilla.

Regularly, she used to hunt Cephas up and carry him home with her for the afternoon; and on the other hand, Gabriel manifested a great fondness for the little fellow, who enjoyed his enviable popularity with a clear conscience. It was years and years afterwards before the secret of his popularity dawned on him. If he had suspected it at the time, his pride, such as he had, would have had a terrible fall.

One day, it was the year of Appomattox, and the month was June, Cephas heard his name called, and answered very promptly, for the voice was the voice of Gabriel, and it was burdened with an invitation to visit the woods and fields that surrounded the town. The weather itself was burdened with the same invitation. The birds sang it, and it rustled in the leaves of the trees. And Cephas leaped from the house, glad of any excuse to escape from the domestic task at which he had been set. They wandered forth, and became a part and parcel of the wild things. The hermit thrush, with his silver bell, was their brother, and the cat-bird, distressed for the safety of her young, was their sister. Yea, and the gray squirrel was their playmate, a shy one, it is true, but none the less a genuine one for all that. They roamed about the green-wood, and over the hills and fields, and finally found themselves in the public highway that leads to Malvern.

Cephas found a cornstalk, and with hardly an effort of his mind, changed it into a fine saddle-horse. The contagion seized Gabriel, and though he was close upon his eighteenth birthday, he secured a cornstalk, which at once became a saddle-horse at his bidding. The magical powers of youth are wonderful, and for a little while the cornstalk horses were as real as any horses could be. The steed that Cephas bestrode was comparatively gentle, but Gabriel's horse developed a desire to take fright at everything he saw. A creature more skittish and nervous was never seen, and his example was soon followed by the steed that Cephas rode. The

two boys were so busily engaged in trying to control their perverse horses, that they failed to see a big covered waggon that came creeping up the hill behind them. So, while they were cutting up their queer capers, the big waggon, drawn by two large mules, was plump upon them. As for Cephas, he didn't care, being at an age when such capers are permissible, but Gabriel blushed when he discovered that his childish pranks had witnesses; and he turned a shade redder when he saw that the occupants of the waggon were, of all the persons in the world, Mr. Billy Sanders and Francis Bethune.

Both of the boys would have passed on but for the compelling voice of Mr. Sanders. "Why, it's little Gabe, and he's little Gabe no longer. And Cephas ain't growed a mite. Hello, Gabe! Hello, Cephas! Howdy, howdy?"

Francis Bethune's salutation was somewhat constrained, or if that be too large a word, was lacking in cordiality. "What is the matter with Gabriel?" he asked.

"It's a thousand pities, Frank," remarked Mr. Sanders, "that Sarah Clopton wouldn't let you be a boy along with the other boys; but she coddled you up jest like you was a gal. Be jigged ef I don't believe you've got on pantalettes right now."

Bethune blushed hotly, while Gabriel and Cephas fairly yelled with laughter—and there was a little resentment in Gabriel's mirth. "But I don't see what could possess Tolliver," Bethune insisted.

"Shucks, Frank! you wouldn't know ef he was to write it down for you, an' Nan Dorrin'ton would know wi'out any tellin'. You ain't a bit brighter about seeh matters than you was the day Nan give you a thumpin'."

At this Gabriel laughed again, for he had been an eye-witness to the episode to which Mr. Sanders referred. A boy has his prejudices, as older persons have theirs. Bethune had always had the appearance of being too fond of himself; when other boys of his age were playing and pranking, he would be primping, and in the afternoon, before he went off to the war, he would strut around town in the uniform of a cadet, and seemed to think himself better than any one else. These things count with boys as much as they do with older persons.

"Climb in the waggin, Gabe an' Cephas, an' tell us about ever'thing an' ever'body. The Yanks didn't take the town off, did they?"

The boys accepted the invitation without further pressing, for they were both fond of Mr. Sanders, and proceeded to give their old friend all the information he desired. Francis Bethune asked no questions, and Gabriel was very glad of it. At bottom, Bethune was a very clever fellow, but the boys are apt to make up their judgments from what is merely superficial. Francis had a very handsome face, and he could have made himself attractive to a youngster on the lookout for friends, but he had chosen a different line of conduct, and as a result, Gabriel had several scores against the

young man. And so had Cephas; for, on one occasion, the latter had gone to the Clopton Place for some wine for his mother, who was something of an invalid, and, coming suddenly on Sarah Clopton, found her in tears. Cephas never had a greater shock than the sight gave him, for he had never connected this self-contained, gray-haired woman with any of the tenderer emotions. In the child's mind, she was simply a sort of superintendent of affairs on the Clopton Place, who, in the early mornings, stood on the back porch of the big house, and, in a voice loud enough to be heard a considerable distance, gave orders to the domestics, and allotted to the field hands their tasks for the day.

Sarah Clopton must have seen how shocked the child was, for she dried her eyes and tried to laugh, saying, "You never expected to see me crying, did you, little boy?" Cephas had no answer for this, but when she asked if he could guess why she was crying, the child remembered what he had heard Nan and Gabriel say, and he gave an answer that was both prompt and blunt. "I reckon Frank Bethune has been making a fool of himself again," said he.

"But how did you know, child?" she asked, placing her soft white fingers under his chin, and lifting his face toward the light. "You are a wise lad for your years," she said, when he made no reply, "and I am sure you are sensible enough to do me a favour. Please say nothing about what you have seen. An old woman's tears amount to very little. And don't be too hard on

Frank. He has simply been playing some college prank, and they are sending him home."

The most interesting piece of news that Gabriel had in his budget related to the hanging of Mr. Absalom Goodlett by some of Sherman's men, when that commander came marching through Georgia. It seems that a negro had told the men that Mr. Goodlett knew where the Clopton silver had been concealed, and they took him in hand and tried to frighten him into giving them information which he did not possess. Threats failing, they secured a rope and strung him up to a tree. They strung him up three times, and the third time, they went off and left him hanging; and but for the promptness of the negro who was the cause of the trouble, and who had been an interested spectator of the proceedings, Mr. Goodlett would never have opened his eyes on the affairs of this world again. The negro cut him down in the nick of time, and as soon as he recovered, he sent the darkey with instructions to go after the men, and tell them where they could find the plate, indicating an isolated spot. Whereupon Mr. Goodlett took his gun, and went to the point indicated. The negro carried out his instructions to the letter. He found the men, who had not gone far, pointed out the spot from a safe distance, and then waited to see what would happen. If he saw anything unusual, he never told of it; but the men were never seen again. Some of their companions returned to search for them, but the search was a futile one. The negro went about with a frightened face for several days, and then he

settled down to work for Mr. Goodlett, in whom he seemed to have a strange interest. He showed this in every way.

"You keep yo' eye on 'im," he used to say to his coloured acquaintances, in speaking of Mr. Goodlett; "keep yo' eye on 'im, an' when you see his under-jaw stickin' out, des turn you' back, an' put yo' fingers in yo' ears."

"You never know," said Mr. Sanders, in commenting on the story, "what a man will do ontell he gits rank pizen mad, or starvin' hongry, or in love."

"What would you do, Mr. Sanders, if you were in love?" Gabriel asked innocently enough.

"Maybe I'd do as Frank does," replied Mr. Sanders, smiling blandly; "shed scaldin' tears one minnit, an' bite my finger-nails the next; maybe I would, but I don't believe it."

"Now, I'll swear you ought not to tell these boys such stuff as that!" exclaimed Francis Bethune angrily. "I don't know about Cephas, but Tolliver doesn't like me any way."

"How do you know?" inquired Gabriel.

"Because you used to make faces at me," replied Bethune, half laughing.

"Why, so did Nan," Gabriel rejoined. "Mine must have been terrible ones for you to remember them so well."

The reference to Nan struck Bethune, and he began to gnaw at the end of his thumb, whereupon Mr. Sanders smiled broadly. The young man reflected a mo-

ment, and then remarked, his face a trifle redder than usual: "Isn't the young lady old enough for you to call her Miss Dorrington?"

"She is," replied Gabriel; "but if she permits me to call her Nan, why should any one else object?"

There was no answer to this, but presently Bethune turned to Gabriel and said: "Why do you dislike me, Tolliver?"

For a little time the lad was silent; he was trying to formulate his prejudices into something substantial and sufficient, but the effort was a futile one. While he was silent, Bethune regarded him with a curious stare. "Honestly," said Gabriel, "I can give no reason; and I'm not sure I dislike you. But you always held your head so high that I kept away from you. I had an idea that you felt yourself above me because my grandmother is not as rich as the Cloptons."

The statement seemed to amaze Bethune. "You couldn't have been more than ten or twelve when I lef' here for the war," he remarked.

"Yes, I was more than thirteen," Gabriel replied.

"Well, I never thought that a boy so young could have such thoughts," Bethune declared.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders; "a fourteen-year-old boy can have some mighty deep thoughts, specially ef he' been brung up in a house full of books, as Gabriel was. I hope, Gabriel," he went on, "that you'll stick to your cornstalk hoss as long as you want to. You'll live longer for it, an' your friends will love you jest the same. Frank here has never been a boy.

Out of bib an' hippin, he jumped into long britches an' a standin' collar, an' the only fun he ever had in his life he got kicked out of college for, an' served him right, too. I'll bet you a thrip to a pint of pot-licker that Nan'll ride a stick hoss tomorrer ef she takes a notion—an' she's seventeen. Don't you forgit, Gabriel, that you'll never be a boy but once, an' you better make the most on it whilst you can."

The waggon came just then to the brow of the hill that overlooked Shady Dale, and here Mr. Sanders brought his team to a standstill. It had been many long months since his eyes or Bethune's had gazed on the familiar scene. "I'll tell you what's the fact, boys," he said, drawing in a long breath—"the purtiest place this side of Paradise lies right yander before our eyes. Ef I had some un to give out the lines, I'd cut loose and sing a hime. Yes, sirs! you'd see me break out an' howl jest like my old coon dog, Louder, used to do when he struck a hot track. The Lord has picked us out of the crowd, Frank, an' holp us along at every turn an' crossin'. But before the week's out, we'll forgit to be thankful. J'inin' the church wouldn't do us a grain of good. By next Sunday week, Frank, you'll be struttin' around as proud as a turkey gobbler, an' you'll git wuss an' wuss less'n Nan takes a notion for to frail you out ag'in."

Bethune relished the remark so little that he chirped to the mules, but Mr. Sanders seized the reins in his own hands. "We've fit an' we've fout, an' we've got knocked out," he went on, "an' now, here we are ready

for to take a fresh start. The Lord send that it's the right start." He would have driven on, but at that moment, a shabby looking vehicle drew up alongside the waggon. Gabriel and Cephas knew at once that the outfit belonged to Mr. Goodlett. His mismatched team consisted of a very large horse and a very small mule, both of them veterans of the war. They had been left by the Federals in a broken-down condition, and Mr. Goodlett found them grazing about, trying to pick up a living. He appropriated them, fed them well, and was now utilising them not only for farm purposes, but for conveying stray travellers to and from Malvern, earning in this way many a dollar that would have gone elsewhere.

Mr. Goodlett drew rein when he saw Mr. Sanders and Francis Bethune, and gave them as cordial a greeting as he could, for he was a very undemonstrative and reticent man. At that time both Gabriel and Cephas thought he was both sour and surly, but, in the course of events, their opinions in regard to that and a great many other matters underwent a considerable change.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mr. Goodlett's Passengers

THE vehicle that Mr. Goodlett was driving was an old hack that had been used for long years to ply between Shady Dale and Malvern. On this occasion, Mr. Goodlett had for his passengers a lady and a young woman apparently about Nan's age. There was such a contrast between the two that Gabriel became absorbed in contemplating them; so much so that he failed to hear the greetings that passed between Mr. Goodlett and Mr. Sanders, who were old-time friends. The elder of the two women was emaciated to a degree, and her face was pale to the point of ghastliness; but in spite of her apparent weakness, there was an ease and a refinement in her manner, a repose and a self-possession that reminded Gabriel of his grandmother, when she was receiving the fine ladies from a distance who sometimes called on her. The younger of the two women, on the other hand, was the picture of health. The buoyancy of youth possessed her. She had an eager, impatient way of handling her fan and handkerchief, and there was a twinkle in her eye that spoke of humour; but her glance never fell directly on the men in the waggon; all her attention was for the invalid.

Mr. Goodlett, his greeting over, was for pushing on, but the voice of the invalid detained him. "Can you tell me," she said, turning to Mr. Sanders, "whether the Gaither Place is occupied? Oh, but I forgot; you are just returning from that horrible, horrible war." She had lifted herself from a reclining position, but fell back hopelessly.

"Why, Ab thar ought to be able to tell you that," responded Mr. Sanders, his voice full of sympathy.

"Well, I jest ain't," declared Mr. Goodlett, with some show of impatience. "I tell you, William, I been so worried an' flurried, an' so disqualified an' mortified, an' so het up wi' fust one thing an' then another, that I ain't skacely had time for to scratch myself on the catchin' places, much less gittin' up all times er night for to see ef the Gaither Place is got folks or ha'nts in it. When you've been through what I have, William, you won't come a-axin' me ef the Gaither house is whar it mought be, or whar it oughter be, or ef it's popylated or dispopylated."

The young lady stroked the invalid's hand and smiled. Something in the frowning face and fractious tone of the old man evidently appealed to her sense of humour. "Don't you think it is absurd," said the pale lady, again appealing to Mr. Sanders, "that a person should live in so small a town, and not know whether one of the largest houses in the place is occupied—a house that belongs to a family that used to be one of the most prominent of the county? Why, of course it is absurd. There is something uncanny

about it. I haven't had such a shock in many a day."

"But, mother," protested the young lady, "why worry about it? A great many strange things have happened to us, and this is the least important of all."

"Why, dearest, this is the strangest of all strange things. The driver here says he lives at Dorringtons', and the Gaither house is not so very far from Dorringtons'."

"Everybody knows," said Gabriel, "that Miss Polly Gaither lives in the Gaither house." He spoke before he was aware, and began to blush. Whereupon the young lady gave him a very bright smile.

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Goodlett, giving the lad a severe look. He started to climb into his seat, but turned to Gabriel. "Is she got a wen?" he asked, with something like a scowl.

"Yes, she has a wen," replied the lad, blushing again, but this time for Mr. Goodlett.

"Well, then, ef she's got a wen, ef Polly Gaithers is got a wen, she's livin' in that house, bekaze, no longer'n last Sat'day, she come roun' for to borry some meal; an' whatsomever she use to have, an' whatsomever she mought have hereafter, she's got a wen now, an' I'll tell you so on a stack of Bibles as high as the court-house."

The young lady laughed, but immediately controlled herself with a half-petulant "Oh dear!" Laughter became her well, for it smoothed away a little frown

of perplexity that had established itself between her eyebrows.

"Oh, we'll take the young man's word for it," said the invalid, "and we are very much obliged to him. What is your name?" When Gabriel had told her, she repeated the name over again. "I used to know your grandmother very well," she said. "Tell her Margaret Bridalbin has returned home, and would be delighted to see her."

"Then, ma'am, you must be Margaret Gaither," remarked Mr. Sanders.

"Yes, I was Margaret Gaither," replied the invalid. "I used to know you very well, Mr. Sanders, and if I had changed as little as you have, I could still boast of my beauty."

"Yet nobody hears me braggin' of mine, Margaret," said Mr. Sanders with a smile that found its reflection in the daughter's face; "but I hope from my heart that home an' old friends will be a good physic for you, an' git you to braggin' ag'in. Anyhow, ef you don't brag on yourself, you can take up a good part of the time braggin' on your daughter."

"Oh, thank you, sir, for the clever joke. My mother has told me long ago how full of fun you are," said the young lady, blushing sufficiently to show that she did not regard the compliment as altogether a joke. "You may drive on now," she remarked to Mr. Goodlett. Whereupon that surly-looking veteran slapped his mismatched team with the loose ends of the reins, and the shabby old hack moved off toward Shady

Dale. Mr. Sanders waited for the vehicle to get some distance ahead, and then he too urged his team forward.

"The word is Home," he said; "I reckon Margaret has had her sheer of trouble, an' a few slices more. She made her own bed, as the sayin' is, an' now she's layin' on it. Well, well, well! when time an' occasions take arter you, it ain't no use to run; you mought jest as well set right flat on the ground an' see what they've got ag'in you."

The remark was not original, nor very deep, but it recurred to Gabriel when trouble plucked at his own sleeve, or when he saw disaster run through a family like a contagion.

In no long time the waggon reached the outskirts of the town, where the highway became a part of the wide street that ran through the centre of Shady Dale, flowing around the old court-house in the semblance of a wide river embracing a small island. Gabriel and Cephas were on the point of leaving the waggon here, but Mr. Sanders was of another mind.

"Ride on to Dorrin'tons' wi' us," he said. "I want to swap a joke or two wi' Mrs. Ab."

"She's sure to get the best of it," Gabriel warned him.

"Likely enough, but that won't spile the fun," responded Mr. Sanders.

Mrs. Absalom, as she was called, was the wife of Mr. Goodlett, and was marked off from the great majority of her sex by her keen appreciation of humour.

Her own contributions were spoiled for some, for the reason that she gave them the tone of quarrelsomeness; whereas, it is to be doubted whether she ever gave way to real anger more than once or twice in her life. She was Dr. Randolph Dorrington's housekeeper, and was a real mother to Nan, who was motherless before she had drawn a dozen breaths of the poisonous air of this world.

By the time the waggon reached Dorrington's, Gabriel, acting on the instructions of Mr. Sanders, had crawled under the cover of the waggon, and was holding out a pair of old shoes, so that a passer-by would imagine that some one was lying prone in the waggon with his feet sticking out.

When the waggon reached the Dorrington Place, Mr. Sanders drew rein, and hailed the house, having signed to Cephas to make himself invisible. Evidently Mrs. Absalom was in the rear, or in the kitchen, which was a favourite resort of hers, for the "hello" had to be repeated a number of times before she made her appearance. She came wiping her face on her ample apron, and brushing the hair from her eyes. She was always a busy housekeeper.

"We're huntin', ma'am, for a place called Cloptons'," said Mr. Sanders in a falsetto voice, his hat pulled down over his eyes; "an' we'd thank you might'ly ef you'd put us on the right road. About four mile back, we picked up a' old snoozer who calls himself William H. Sanders, an' he keeps on talkin' about the Clopton Place."

"Why, the Clopton Place is right down the road a piece. What in the world is the matter wi' old Billy?" she inquired with real solicitude. "Was he wounded in the war, or is he jest up to some of his old-time devilment?"

"Well, ma'am, from the looks of the jimmyjon we found by his side, he must 'a' shot hisself in the neck. He complains of cold feet, an' he's got 'em stuck out from under the kiver."

"Don't you worry about that," said Mrs. Absalom; "the climate will never strike in on old Billy's feet till he gits better acquainted wi' soap an' water."

"An' he talks in his sleep about a Mrs. Absalom," Mr. Sanders went on, "an' he cries, an' says she used to be his sweetheart, but he had to jilt her bekaze she can't cook a decent biscuit."

"The old villain!" exclaimed Mrs. Absalom, with well simulated indignation; "he can't tell the truth even when he's drunk. If he ever sobers up in this world, I'll give him a long piece of my mind. Jest drive on the way you've started, an' ef you can keep in the middle of the road wi' that drunken old slink in the waggin, you'll come to Cloptons' in a mighty few minutes."

At this juncture Mr. Sanders was obliged to laugh, whereupon, Mrs. Absalom, looking narrowly at the travellers, had no difficulty in recognising them. "Well, my life!" she exclaimed, raising her hands above her head in a gesture of amazement. "Why, that's old Billy, an' him sober; and Franky Bethune, an' him not

a primpin'! Well, well! I'd 'a' never believed it ef I hadn't 'a' seed it. I vow I'm beginnin' to believe that war's a real good thing; it's like a revival meetin' for some folks. I'm sorry Ab didn't take his gun an' jine in —maybe he'd 'a' shed his stinginess. But I declare to gracious, I'm glad to see you all; the sight of you is good for the sore eyes. An' Frank tryin' to raise a beard! Well, honey, I'll send you a bottle of bergamot grease to rub on it."

Mrs. Absalom came out to the waggon and shook hands with the returned warriors very heartily, and, sharp as her tongue was, there were tears in her eyes as she greeted them; for in that region, nearly all had feelings of kinship for their neighbours and friends, and in that day and time, people were not ashamed of their emotions.

"Margaret Gaither has come back," remarked Mr. Sanders. "Ab fetched her in his hack."

"Well, the poor creetur'!" exclaimed Mrs. Absalom; "they say she's had trouble piled on her house-high."

"She won't have much more in this world ef looks is any sign," Mr. Sanders replied. "She ain't nothin' but a livin' skeleton, but she's got a mighty lively gal."

The waggon moved on and left Mrs. Absalom leaning on the gate, a position that she kept for some little time. Farther down the road, Gabriel, whose example was followed by Cephas, bade Mr. Sanders good-bye, nodded lightly to Francis Bethune, and jumped from the waggon.

"Wait a moment, Tolliver," said Bethune. "I want

you to come to see me—and bring Cephas with you. I am going to make you like me if I can. The home folks have been writing great things about you. Oh, you *must* come," he insisted, seeing that Gabriel was hesitating. "I want to show you what a good fellow I can be when I try right hard."

"Yes, you boys must come," said Mr. Sanders; "an' ef Frank is off courtin' that new gal—I ketched him cuttin' his eye at her—you can hunt me up, an' I'll tell you some old-time tales that'll make your hair stan' on end."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Story of Margaret Gaither

GABRIEL and Cephas started toward their homes, which lay in the same direction. Instead of going around by road or street, they cut across the fields and woods. Before they had gone very far, they heard a rustling, swishing sound in the pine-thicket through which they were passing, but gave it little attention, both being used to the noises common to the forest. In their minds it was either a rabbit or a grey fox scuttling away; or a poree scratching in the bushes, or a ground-squirrel running in the underbrush.

But a moment later, Nan Dorrington, followed by Tasma Tid, burst from the pine-thicket, crying, "Oh, you walk so fast, you two!" She was panting and laughing, and as she stood before the lads, one little hand at her throat, and the other vainly trying to control her flying hair, a delicious rosiness illuminating her face, Gabriel knew that he had just been doing her a gross injustice. As he walked along the path, followed by his faithful Cephas, he had been mentally comparing her to a young woman he had just seen in Mr. Goodlett's hack; and had been saying to himself that the new-comer was, if possible, more beautiful than Nan.

But now here was Nan herself in person, and Gabriel's

comparisons appeared to be shabby indeed. With Nan before his eyes, he could see what a foolish thing it was to compare her with any one in this world except herself. There was a flavour of wildness in her beauty that gave it infinite charm and variety. It was a wildness that is wedded to grace and vivacity, such as we see embodied in the form and gestures of the wood-dove, or the partridge, or the flying squirrel, when it is unawed by the presence of man. The flash of her dark brown eyes, her tawny hair blowing free, and her lithe figure, with the dark green pines for a background, completed the most charming picture it is possible for the mind to conceive. All that Gabriel was conscious of, beyond a dim surprise that Nan should be here—the old Nan that he used to know—was a sort of dawning thrill of ecstasy as he contemplated her. He stood staring at her with his mouth open.

"Why do you look at me like that, Gabriel?" she cried; "I am no ghost. And why do you walk so fast? I have been running after you as hard as I can. And, wasn't that Francis Bethune in the waggon with Mr. Sanders?"

"Did you run hard just to ask me that? Mrs. Absalom could have saved you all this trouble." The mention of Bethune's name had brought Gabriel to earth, and to commonplace thoughts again. "Yes, that was Master Bethune, and he has grown to be a very handsome young man."

"Oh, he was always good-looking," said Nan lightly. "Where are you and Cephas going?"

"Straight home," replied Gabriel.

"Well, I'm going there, too. I heard Nonny" (this was Mrs. Absalom) "say that Margaret Gaither has come home again, and then I remembered that your grandmother promised to tell me a story about her some day. I'm going to tease her to-day until she tells it."

"And didn't Mrs. Absalom tell you that Bethune was in the waggon with Mr. Sanders?" Gabriel inquired, in some astonishment.

"Oh, Gabriel! you are so—" Nan paused as if hunting for the right term or word. Evidently she didn't find it, for she turned to Gabriel with a winning smile, and asked what Mr. Sanders had had to say. "I'm so glad he's come I don't know what to do. I wouldn't live in a town that didn't have its Mr. Sanders," she declared.

"Well, about the first thing he said was to remind Bethune of the time when you whacked him over the head with a cudgel."

"And what did Master Francis say to that?" inquired Nan, with a laugh.

"Why, what could he say? He simply turned red. Now, if it had been me, I——"

The path was so narrow, that Nan, the two lads, and Tasma Tid were walking in Indian file. Nan stopped so suddenly and unexpectedly that Gabriel fell against her. As he did so, she turned and seized him by the arm, and emphasised her words by shaking him gently as each was uttered. "Now—Gabriel—don't—say—disagreeable—things!"

What she meant he had not the least idea, and it was not the first nor the last time that his wit lacked the nimbleness to follow and catch her meaning.

"Disagreeable!" he exclaimed. "Why, I was simply going to say that if I had been in Bethune's shoes to-day, I should have declared that you did the proper thing."

Nan dropped a low curtsey, saying, "Oh, thank you, sir—what was the gentleman's name, Cephas—the gentleman who was such a cavalier?"

"Was he a Frenchman?" asked Cephas.

"Oh, Cephas! you should be ashamed. You have as little learning as I." With that she turned and went along the path at such a rapid pace that it was as much as the lads could do to keep up with her, without breaking into an undignified trot.

Nan went home with Gabriel; was there before him indeed, for he paused a moment to say something to Cephas. She ran along the walk, took the steps two at a time, and as she ran skipping along the hallway, she cried out: "Grandmother Lumsden! where are you? Oh, what do you think? Margaret Gaither has come home!" When Gabriel entered the room, Nan had fetched a footstool, and was already sitting at Mrs. Lumsden's feet, holding one of the old lady's frail, but beautiful white hands.

Here was another picture, the beauty of which dawned on Gabriel later—youth and innocence sitting at the feet of sweet and wholesome old age. The lad was always proud of his grandmother, but never more so than

at that moment when her beauty and refinement were brought into high relief by her attitude toward Nan Dorrington. Gabriel was very happy to be near those two. Not for a weary time had Nan been so friendly and familiar as she was now, and he felt a kind of exaltation.

"Margaret Gaither! Margaret Gaither!" Gabriel's grandmother repeated the name as if trying to summon up some memory of the past. "Poor girl! Did you see her, Gabriel? And how did she look?" With a boy's bluntness, he described her physical condition, exaggerating, perhaps, its worst features, for these had made a deep impression on him. "Oh, I'm so sorry for her! and she has a daughter!" said Mrs. Lumsden softly. "I will call on them as soon as possible. And then if poor Margaret is unable to return the visit, the daughter will come. And you must be here, Nan; Gabriel will fetch you. And you, Gabriel—for once you must be polite and agreeable. Candace shall brush up your best suit, and if it is to be mended, I will mend it."

Nan and Gabriel laughed at this. Both knew that this famous best suit would not reach to the lad's ankles, and that the sleeves of the coat would end a little way below the elbow.

"I can't imagine what you are laughing at," said Mrs. Lumsden, with a faint smile. "I am sure the suit is a very respectable one, especially when you have none better."

"No, Grandmother Lumsden; Gabriel will have to take his tea in the kitchen with Aunt Candace."

However, the affair never came off. The dear old lady, in whom the social instinct was so strong, had no opportunity to send the invitation until long afterward. Nan was compelled to beg very hard for the story of Margaret Gaither. It was never the habit of Gabriel's grandmother to indulge in idle gossip; she could always find some excuse for the faults of those who were unfortunate; but Nan had the art of persuasion at her tongue's end. Whether it was this fact or the fact that Mrs. Lumsden believed that the story carried a moral that Nan would do well to digest, it would be impossible to say. At any rate, the youngsters soon had their desire. The story will hardly bear retelling; it can be compressed into a dozen lines, and be made as uninteresting as a newspaper paragraph; but, as told by Gabriel's grandmother, it had the charm which sympathy and pity never fail to impart to a narrative. When it came to an end, Nan was almost in tears, though she could never tell why.

"It happened, Nan, before you and Gabriel were born," said Mrs. Lumsden. "Margaret Gaither was one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen, and at that time Pulaski Tomlin was one of the handsomest young men in all this region. Naturally these two were drawn together. They were in love with each other from the first, and, finally, a day was set for the wedding. They were to have been married in November, but one night in October, the Tomlin Place was found to be on fire. The flames had made considerable headway before they were discovered, and, to me, it was a most horrible sight.

Yet, horrible as it was, there was a fascination about it. The sweeping roar of the flames attracted me and held me spellbound, but I hope I shall never be under such a spell again.

"Well, it was impossible to save the house, and no one attempted such a preposterous feat. It was all that the neighbours could do to prevent the spread of the flames to the near-by houses. Some of the furniture was saved, but the house was left to burn. All of a sudden, Fanny Tomlin——"

"You mean Aunt Fanny?" interrupted Nan.

"Yes, my dear. All of a sudden Fanny Tomlin remembered that her mother's portrait had been left hanging on the wall. Without a word to any one she ran into the house. How she ever passed through the door safely, I never could understand, for every instant, it seemed to me, great tongues and sheets of flame were darting across it and lapping and licking inward, as if trying to force an entrance. You may be sure that we who were looking on, helpless, held our breaths when Fanny Tomlin disappeared through the doorway. Pulaski Tomlin was not a witness to this performance, but he was quickly informed of it; and then he ran this way and that, like one distraught. Twice he called her name, and his voice must have been heard above the roar of the flames, for presently she appeared at an upper window, and cried out, 'What is it, brother?' 'Come down! Come out!' he shouted. 'I'm afraid I can't,' she answered; and then she waved her hand and disappeared, after trying vainly to close the blinds.

" But no sooner had Pulaski Tomlin caught a glimpse of his sister, and heard her voice, than he lowered his head like an angry bull, and rushed through the flames that now had possession of the door. I, for one, never expected to see him again; and I stood there frightened, horrified, fascinated, utterly helpless. Oh, when you go through a trial like that, my dear," said Mrs. Lumsden, stroking Nan's hair gently, " you will realise how small and weak and contemptible human beings are when they are engaged in a contest with the elements. There we stood, helpless and horror-stricken, with two of our friends in the burning house, which was now almost completely covered with the roaring flames. What thoughts I had I could never tell you, but I wondered afterward that I had not become suddenly grey.

" We waited an age, it seemed to me. Major Tomlin Perdue, of Halcyondale, who happened to be here at the time, was walking about wringing his hands and crying like a child. Up to that moment, I had thought him to be a hard and cruel man, but we can never judge others, not even our closest acquaintances, until we see them put to the test. Suddenly, I heard Major Perdue cry, 'Ah!' and saw him leap forward as a wild animal leaps.

" Through the doorway, which was now entirely covered with a roaring flame, a blurred and smoking figure had rushed—a bulky, shapeless figure, it seemed—and then it collapsed and fell, and lay in the midst of the smoke, almost within reach of the flames. But Major Perdue was there in an instant, and he dragged the

shapeless mass away from the withering heat and stifling smoke. After this, he had more assistance than was necessary or desirable.

"'Stand back!' he cried; and his voice had in it the note that men never fail to obey. 'Stand back there! Where is Dorrington? Why isn't he here?' Your father, my dear, had gone into the country to see a patient. He was on his way home when he saw the red reflection of the flames in the sky, and he hastened as rapidly as his horse could go. He arrived just in the nick of time. He heard his name called as he drove up, and was prompt to answer. 'Make way there!' commanded Major Perdue; 'make way for Dorrington. And you ladies go home! There's nothing you can do here.' Then I heard Fanny Tomlin call my name, and Major Perdue repeated in a ringing voice, 'Lucy Lumsden is wanted here!'

"I don't know how it was, but every command given by Major Perdue was obeyed promptly. The crowd dispersed at once, with the exception of two or three, who were detailed to watch the few valuables that had been saved, and a few men who lingered to see if they could be of any service.

"Pulaski Tomlin had been kinder to his sister than to himself. Only the hem of her dress was scorched. It may be absurd to say so, but that was the first thing I noticed; and, in fact, that was all the injury she had suffered. Her brother had found her unconscious on a bed, and he simply rolled her in the quilts and blankets, and brought her downstairs, and out through the

smoke and flame to the point where he fell. Fanny has not so much as a scar to show. But you can look at her brother's face and see what he suffered. When they lifted him into your father's buggy, his outer garments literally crumbled beneath the touch, and one whole side of his face was raw and bleeding.

"But he never thought of himself, though the agony he endured must have been awful. His first word was about his sister: 'Is Fanny hurt?' And when he was told that she was unharmed, he closed his eyes, saying, 'Don't worry about me.' We brought him here—it was Fanny's wish—and by the time he had been placed in bed, the muscles of his mouth were drawn as you see them now. There was nothing to do but to apply cold water, and this was done for the most part by Major Perdue, though both Fanny and I were anxious to relieve him. I never saw a man so devoted in his attentions. He was absolutely tireless; and I was so struck with his tender solicitude that I felt obliged to make to him what was at once a confession and an apology. 'I once thought, Major Perdue, that you were a hard and cruel man,' said I, 'but I'll never think so again.'

"'But why did you think so in the first place?' he asked.

"'Well, I had heard of several of your shooting scrapes,' I replied.

"He regarded me with a smile. 'There are two sides to everything, especially a row,' he said. 'I made up my mind when a boy that turn-about is fair play. When

I insult a man, I'm prepared to take the consequences; yet I never insulted a man in my life. The man that insults me must pay for it. Women may wipe their feet on me, and children may spit on me; but no man shall insult me, not by so much as the lift of an eyelash, or the twitch of an upper lip. Pulaski here has done me many a favour, some that he tried to hide, and I'd never get through paying him if I were to nurse him night and day for the rest of my natural life. In some things, Ma'am, you'll find me almost as good as a dog.'

"I must have given him a curious stare," continued Mrs. Lumsden, "for he laughed softly, and remarked, 'If you'll think it over, Ma'am, you'll find that a dog has some mighty fine qualities.' And it is true."

"But what about Margaret Gaither?" inquired Nan, who was determined that the love-story should not be lost in a wilderness of trifles—as she judged them to be.

"Poor Margaret!" murmured Gabriel's grandmother. "I declare! I had almost forgotten her. Well, bright and early the next morning, Margaret came and asked to see Pulaski Tomlin. I left her in the parlour, and carried her request to the sick-room.

"'Brother,' said Fanny, 'Margaret is here, and wants to see you. Shall she come in?'

"I saw Pulaski clench his hands; his bosom heaved and his lips quivered. 'Not for the world!' he exclaimed; 'oh, not for the world!'

"'I can't tell her that,' said I. 'Nor I,' sobbed Fanny, covering her face with her hands. 'Oh, it will kill her!'

"Major Perdue turned to me, his eyes wet. 'Do you know why he doesn't want her to see him?' I could only give an affirmative nod. 'Do you know, Fanny?' She could only say, 'Yes, yes!' between her sobs. 'It is for her sake alone; we all see that,' declared Major Perdue. 'Now, then,' he went on, touching me on the arm, 'I want you to see how hard a hard man can be. Show me where the poor child is.'

"I led him to the parlour door. He stood aside for me to enter first, but I shook my head and leaned against the door for support. 'This is Miss Gaither?' he said, as he entered alone. 'My name is Perdue—Tomlin Perdue. We are very sorry, but no one is permitted to see Pulaski, except those who are nursing him.' 'That is what I am here for,' she said, 'and no one has a better right. I am to be his wife; we are to be married next month.' 'It is not a matter of right, Miss Gaither. Are you prepared to sustain a very severe shock?' 'Why, what—what is the trouble?' 'Can you not conceive a reason why you should not see him now—at this time, and for many days to come?' 'I cannot,' she replied haughtily. 'That, Miss Gaither, is precisely the reason why you are not to see him now,' said Major Perdue. His tone was at once humble and tender. 'I don't understand you at all,' she exclaimed almost violently. 'I tell you I will see him; I'll beat upon the wall; I'll lie across the door, and compel you to open it. Oh, why am I treated so and by his friends!' She flung herself upon a sofa, weeping wildly; and there I found her, when, a moment later, I entered the room in response to a gesture from Major Perdue.

"Whether she glanced up and saw me, or whether she divined my presence, I could never guess," Gabriel's grandmother went on, "but without raising her face, she began to speak to me. 'This is your house, Miss Lucy,' she said—she always called me Miss Lucy—'and why can't I, his future wife, go in and speak to Pulaski; or, at the very least, hold his hand, and help you and Fanny minister to his wants?' I made her no answer, for I could not trust myself to speak; I simply sat on the edge of the sofa by her, and stroked her hair, trying in this mute way to demonstrate my sympathy. She seemed to take some comfort from this, and finally put her request in a different shape. Would I permit her to sit in a chair near the door of the room in which Pulaski lay, until such time as she could see him? 'I will give you no trouble whatever,' she said. 'I am determined to see him,' she declared; 'he is mine, and I am his.' I gave a cordial assent to this proposition, carried a comfortable chair and placed it near the door, and there she stationed herself.

"I went into the room where the others were, and was surprised to see Fanny Tomlin looking so cheerful. Even Major Perdue appeared to be relieved. Fanny asked me a question with her eyes, and I answered it aloud. 'She is sitting by the door, and says she will remain there until she can see Pulaski.' He beat his hand against the headboard of the bed, his mental agony was so great, and kept murmuring to himself. Major Perdue turned his back on his friend's writhings, and went to the window. Presently he returned to the bed-

side, his watch in his hand. 'Pulaski,' he said, 'if she's there fifteen minutes from now, I shall invite her in.' Pulaski Tomlin made no reply, and we continued our ministrations in perfect silence.

"A few minutes later, I had occasion to go into my own room for a strip of linen, and to my utter amazement, the chair I had placed for Margaret Gaither was empty. Had she gone for a drink of water, or for a book? I went from room to room, calling her name, but she had gone; and I have never laid eyes on her from that day to this. She went away to Malvern on a visit, and while there eloped with a Louisiana man named Bridalbin, whose reputation was none too savoury, and we never heard of her again. Even her Aunt Polly lost all trace of her."

"What did Mr. Tomlin say when you told him she was gone?" Nan inquired.

"We never told him. I think he understood that she was gone almost as soon as she went, for his spiritual faculties are very keen. I remember on one occasion, and that not so very long ago, when he refused to retire at night, because he had a feeling that he would be called for; and his intuitions were correct. He was summoned to the bedside of one of his friends in the country, and, as he went along, he carried your father with him. Margaret Gaither, such as she was, was the sum and the substance of his first and last romance. He suffered, but his suffering has made him strong.

"Yes," Mrs. Lumsden went on, "it has made him strong and great in the highest sense. Do you know

why he is called Neighbour Tomlin? It is because he loves his neighbours as he loves himself. There is no sacrifice that he will not make for them. The poorest and meanest person in the world, black or white, can knock at Neighbour Tomlin's door any hour of the day or night, and obtain food, money or advice, as the case may be. If his wife or his children are ill, Neighbour Tomlin will get out of bed and go in the cold and rain, and give them the necessary attention. To me, there never was a more beautiful countenance in the world than Neighbour Tomlin's poor scarred face. But for that misfortune we should probably never have known what manner of man he is. The Providence that urged Margaret Gaither to fly from this house was arranging for the succour of many hundreds of unfortunates, and Pulaski Tomlin was its instrument."

"If I had been Margaret Gaither," said Nan, clenching her hands together, "I never would have left that door. Never! They couldn't have dragged me away. I've never been in love, I hope, but I have feelings that tell me what it is, and I never would have gone away."

"Well, we must not judge others," said Gabriel's grandmother gently. "Poor Margaret acted according to her nature. She was vain, and lacked stability, but I really believe that Providence had a hand in the whole matter."

"I know I'm pretty," remarked Nan, solemnly, "but I'm not vain."

"Why, Nan!" exclaimed Mrs. Lumsden, laughing; "what put in your head the idea that you are pretty?"

"I don't mean my own self," explained Nan, "but the other self that I see in the glass. She and I are very good friends, but sometimes we quarrel. She isn't the one that would have stayed at the door, but my own, own self."

Mrs. Lumsden looked at the girl closely to see if she was joking, but Nan was very serious indeed. "I'm sure I don't understand you," said Gabriel's grandmother.

"Gabriel does," replied Nan complacently. Gabriel understood well enough, but he never could have explained it satisfactorily to any one who was unfamiliar with Nan's way of putting things.

"Well, you are certainly a pretty girl, Nan," Gabriel's grandmother admitted, "and when you and Francis Bethune are married, you will make a handsome pair."

"When Francis Bethune and I are married!" exclaimed Nan, giving a swift side-glance at Gabriel, who pretended to be reading. "Why, what put such an idea in your head, Grandmother Lumsden?"

"Why, it is on the cards, my dear. It is what, in my young days, they used to call the proper caper."

"Well, when Frank and I are to be married, I'll send you a card of invitation so large that you will be unable to get it in the front door." She rose from the footstool, saying, "I must go home; good-bye, everybody; and send me word when you have chocolate cake."

This was so much like the Nan who had been his comrade for so long that Gabriel felt a little thrill of exul-

tation. A little later he asked his grandmother what she meant by saying that it was on the cards for Nan to marry Bethune.

"Why, I have an idea that the matter has already been arranged," she answered with a knowing smile. "It would be so natural and appropriate. You are too young to appreciate the wisdom of such arrangements, Gabriel, but you will understand it when you are older. Nan is not related in any way to the Cloptons, though a great many people think so. Her grandmother was captured by the Creeks when only a year or two old. She was the only survivor of a party of seven which had been ambushed by the Indians. She was too young to give any information about herself. She could say a few words, and she knew that her name was Rosalind, but that was all. She was ransomed by General McGillivray, and sent to Shady Dale. Under the circumstances, there was nothing for Raleigh Clopton to do but adopt her. Thus she became Rosalind Clopton. She married Benier Odom when, as well as could be judged, she was more than forty years old. Randolph Dorrington married her daughter, who died when Nan was born. Marriage, Gabriel, is not what young people think it is; and I do hope that when you take a wife, it will be some one you have known all your life."

"I hope so, too," Gabriel responded with great heartiness.

CHAPTER SIX

The Passing of Margaret

THE day after the return of Mr. Sanders and Francis Bethune from the war, Gabriel's grandmother had an early caller in the person of Miss Fanny Tomlin. For a maiden lady, Miss Fanny was very plump and good-looking. Her hair was grey, and she still wore it in short curls, just as she had worn it when a girl. The style became her well. The short curls gave her an air of jauntiness, which was in perfect keeping with her disposition, and they made a very pretty frame for her rosy, smiling face. Socially, she was the most popular person in the town, with both young and old. A children's party was a dull affair in Shady Dale without Miss Fanny to give it shape and form, to suggest games, and to make it certain that the timid ones should have their fair share of the enjoyment. Indeed, the community would have been a very dull one but for Miss Fanny; in return for which the young people conferred the distinction of kinship on her by calling her Aunt Fanny. She had remained single because her youngest brother, Pulaski, was unmarried, and needed some one to take care of him, so she said. But she had another

brother, Silas Tomlin, who was twice a widower, and who seemed to need some one to take care of him, for he presented a very mean and miserable appearance.

It chanced that when Miss Fanny called, Gabriel was studying his lessons, using the dining-room table as a desk, and he was able to hear the conversation that ensued. Miss Fanny stood on no ceremony in entering. The front door was open and she entered without knocking, saying, "If there's nobody at home I'll carry the house away. Where are you, Lucy?"

"In my room, Fanny; come right in."

"How are you, and how is the high and mighty Gabriel?" Having received satisfactory answers to her friendly inquiries, Miss Fanny plunged at once into the business that had brought her out so early. "What do you think, Lucy? Margaret Gaither and her daughter have returned. They are at the Gaither Place, and Miss Polly has just told me that there isn't a mouthful to eat in the house—and there is Margaret at the point of death! Why, it is dreadful. Something must be done at once, that's certain. I wouldn't have bothered you, but you know what the circumstances are. I don't know what Margaret's feelings are with respect to me; you know we never were bosom friends. Yet I never really disliked her, and now, after all that has happened, I couldn't bear to think that she was suffering for anything. Likely enough she would be embarrassed if I called and offered assistance. What is to be done?"

"Wouldn't it be best for some one to call—some one

who was her friend?" The cool, level voice of Gabriel's grandmother seemed to clear the atmosphere. "Whatever is to be done should be done sympathetically. If I could see Polly, there would be no difficulty."

"Well, I saw Miss Polly," said Miss Fanny, "and she told me the whole situation, and I was on the point of saying that I'd run back home and send something over, when an upper window was opened, and Margaret Gaither's daughter stood there gazing at me—and she's a beauty, Lucy; there's a chance for Gabriel there. Well, you know how deaf Miss Polly is; if I had said what I wanted to say, that child would have heard every word, and there was something in her face that held me dumb. Miss Polly talked and I nodded my head, and that was all. The old soul must have thought the cat had my tongue." Miss Fanny laughed uneasily as she made the last remark.

"If Margaret is ill, she should have attention. I will go there this morning." This was Mrs. Lumsden's decision.

"I'll send the carriage for you as soon as I can run home," said Miss Fanny. With that she rose to go, and hustled out of the room, but in the hallway she turned and remarked: "Tell Gabriel that he will have to lengthen his suspenders, now that Nan has put on long dresses."

"Oh, no!" protested Mrs. Lumsden. "We mustn't put any such nonsense in Gabriel's head. Nan is for Francis Bethune. If it isn't all arranged it ought to be. Why, the land of Dorrington joins the land that

Bethune will fall heir to some day, and it seems natural that the two estates should become one." Gabriel's grandmother had old-fashioned ideas about marriage.

"Oh, I see!" replied Miss Fanny with a laugh; "you are so intent on joining the two estates in wedlock that you take no account of the individuals. But brother Pulaski says that for many years to come, the more land a man has the poorer he will become."

"Upon my word, I don't see how that can be," responded Mrs. Lumsden. This was the first faint whiff of the new order that had come to the nostrils of the dear old lady.

Miss Fanny went home, and in no long time Neighbour Tomlin's carriage came to the door. At the last moment, Mrs. Lumsden decided that Gabriel should go with her. "It may be necessary for you to go on an errand. I presume there are servants there, but I don't know whether they are to be depended on."

So Gabriel helped his grandmother into the carriage, climbed in after her, and in a very short time they were at the Gaither Place. The young woman whom Gabriel had seen in Mr. Goodlett's hack was standing in the door, and the little frown on her forehead was more pronounced than ever. She was evidently troubled.

"Good-morning," said Mrs. Lumsden. "I have come to see Margaret. Does she receive visitors?"

"My name is Margaret, too," said the young woman, after returning Mrs. Lumsden's salutation, and bowing to Gabriel. "But of course you came to see my mother. She is upstairs—she would be carried there, though I

begged her to take one of the lower rooms. She is in the room in which she was born."

"I know the way very well," said Mrs. Lumsden. She was for starting up the stairway, but the young woman detained her by a gesture and turned to Gabriel.

"Won't you come in?" she inquired. "We are old acquaintances, you know. Your name is Gabriel—wait! —Gabriel Tolliver. Don't you see how well I know you? Come, we'll help your grandmother up the stairs." This they did—the girl with the firm and practised hand of an expert, and Gabriel with the awkwardness common to young fellows of his age. The young woman led Mrs. Lumsden to her mother's bedside, and presently came back to Gabriel.

"We will go down now, if you please," she said. "My mother is very ill—worse than she has ever been —and you can't imagine how lonely I am. Mother is at home here, while my home, if I have any, is in Louisiana. I suppose you never had any trouble?"

"My mother is dead," he said simply. Margaret reached out her hand and touched him gently on the arm. It was a gesture of impulsive sympathy.

"What is it?" Gabriel asked, thinking she was calling his attention to something she saw or heard.

"Nothing," she said softly. Gabriel understood then, and he could have kicked himself for his stupidity. "Your grandmother is a very beautiful old lady," she remarked after a period of silence.

"She is very good to me," Gabriel replied, at a loss what to say, for he always shrank from praising those

near and dear to him. As he sat there, he marvelled at the self-possession of this young woman in the midst of strangers, and with her mother critically ill.

In a little while he heard his grandmother calling him from the head of the stairs. "Gabriel, jump in the carriage and fetch Dr. Dorrington at once. He's at home at this hour."

He did as he was bid, and Nan, who was coming uptown on business of her own, so she said, must needs get in the carriage with her father. The combination was more than Gabriel had bargained for. There was a twinkle in Dr. Dorrington's eye, as he glanced good-humouredly from one to the other, that Gabriel did not like at all. For some reason or other, which he was unable to fathom, the young man was inclined to fight shy of Nan's father; and there was nothing he liked less than to find himself in Dr. Dorrington's company—more especially when Nan was present, too. Noting the quizzical glances of the physician, Gabriel, like a great booby, began to blush, and in another moment, Nan was blushing, too.

"Now, father"—she only called him father when she was angry, or dreadfully in earnest—"Now, father! if you begin your teasing, I'll jump from the carriage. I'll not ride with a grown man who doesn't know how to behave in his daughter's company."

Her father laughed gaily. "Teasing? Why, I wasn't thinking of teasing. I was just going to remark that the weather is very warm for the season, and then I intended to suggest to Gabriel that, as I proposed to

get you a blue parasol, he would do well to get him a red one."

"And why should Gabriel get a parasol?" Nan inquired with a show of indignation.

"Why, simply to be in the fashion," her father replied. "I remember the time when you cried for a hat because Gabriel had one; I also remember that once when you were wearing a sun-bonnet, Gabriel borrowed one and wore it—and a pretty figure he cut in it."

"I don't see how you can remember it," said Gabriel laughing and blushing.

"Well, I don't see how in the world I could forget it," Dr. Dorrington responded in tone so solemn that Nan laughed in spite of her uncomfortable feelings.

"You say Margaret Gaither has a daughter, Gabriel?" said Dr. Dorrington, suddenly growing serious, much to the relief of the others. "And about Nan's age? Well, you will have to go in with me, daughter, and see her. If her mother is seriously ill, it will be a great comfort to her to have near her some one of her own age."

Nan made a pretty little mouth at this command, to show that she didn't relish it, but otherwise she made no objection. Indeed, as matters fell out, it became almost her duty to go in to Margaret Bridalbin; for when the carriage reached the house, the young girl was standing at the gate.

"Is this Dr. Dorrington? Well, you are to go up at once. They are constantly calling to know if you have come. I don't know how my dearest is—I dread to

know. Oh, I am sure you will do what you can." There was an appeal in the girl's voice that went straight to the heart of the physician.

"You may make your mind easy on that score, my dear," said Dr. Dorrington, laying his hand lightly on her shoulder. There was something helpful and hopeful in the very tone of his voice. "This is my daughter Nan," he added.

Margaret turned to Nan, who was lagging behind somewhat shyly. "Will you please come in?—you and Gabriel Tolliver. It is very lonely here, and everything is so still and quiet. My name is Margaret Bridalbin," she said. She took Nan's hand, and looked into her eyes as if searching for sympathy. And she must have found it there, for she drew Nan toward her and kissed her.

That settled it for Nan. "My name is Nan Dorrington," she said, swallowing a lump in her throat, "and I hope we shall be very good friends."

"We are sure to be," replied the other, with emphasis. "I always know at once."

They went into the dim parlour, and Nan and Margaret sat with their arms entwined around each other. "Gabriel told me yesterday that you were a young girl," Nan remarked.

"I am seventeen," replied the other.

"Only seventeen! Why, I am seventeen, and yet I seem to be a mere child by the side of you. You talk and act just as a grown woman does."

"That is because I have never associated with chil-

dren of my own age. I have always been thrown with older persons. And then my mother has been ill a long, long time, and I have been compelled to do a great deal of thinking. I know of nothing more disagreeable than to have to think. Do you dislike poor folks?"

"No, I don't," replied Nan, snuggling up to Margaret. "Some of my very bestest friends are poor."

Margaret smiled at the childish adjective, and placed her cheek against Nan's for a moment. "I'm glad you don't dislike poverty," she said, "for we are very poor."

"When it comes to that," Nan responded, "everybody around here is poor—everybody except Grandfather Clopton and Mr. Tomlin. They have money, but I don't know where they get it. Nonny says that some folks have only to dream of money, and when they wake in the morning they find it under their pillows."

Dr. Dorrington came downstairs at this moment. "Your mother is very much better than she was awhile ago," he said to Margaret. "She never should have made so long a journey. She has wasted in that way strength enough to have kept her alive for six months."

"I begged and implored her not to undertake it," the daughter explained, "but nothing would move her. Even when she needed nourishing food, she refused to buy it; she was saving it to bring her home."

"Well, she is here now, and we'll do the best we can. Gabriel, will you run over and ask Fanny Tomlin to come? And if Neighbour Tomlin is there tell him I want to see him on some important business."

It was very clear to Gabriel from all this that there

was small hope for the poor lady above. She might be better than she was when the doctor arrived, but there was no ray of hope to be gathered from Dr. Dorrington's countenance.

Pulaski Tomlin and his sister responded to the summons at once; and with Gabriel's grandmother holding her hand, the poor lady had an interview with Pulaski Tomlin. But she never saw his face nor he hers. The large screen was carried upstairs from the dining-room, and placed in front of the bed; and near the door a chair was placed for Pulaski Tomlin. It was the heart's desire of the dying lady that Neighbour Tomlin should become the guardian of her daughter. He was deeply affected when told of her wishes, but before consenting to accept the responsibility, asked to see the daughter, and went to the parlour, where she was sitting with Nan and Gabriel. When he came in Nan ran and kissed him as she never failed to do, for, though his face on one side was so scarred and drawn that the sight of it sometimes shocked strangers, those who knew him well, found his wounded countenance singularly attractive.

"This is Margaret," he said, taking the girl's hand. "Come into the light, my dear, where you may see me as I am. Your mother has expressed a wish that I should become your guardian. As an old and very dear friend of mine, she has the right to make the request. I am willing and more than willing to meet her wishes, but first I must have your consent."

They went into the hallway, which was flooded with light. "Are you the Mr. Tomlin of whom I have heard

my mother speak?" Margaret asked, fixing her clear eyes on his face; and when he had answered in the affirmative—"I wonder that she asked you, after what she has told me. She certainly has no claims on you."

"Ah, my dear, that is where you are wrong," he insisted. "I feel that every one in this world has claims on me, especially those who were my friends in old times. It is I who made a mistake, and not your mother; and I should be glad to rectify that mistake now, as far as I can, by carrying out her wishes. You know, of course, that she is very ill; will you go up and speak with her?"

"No, not now; not when there are so many strangers there," Margaret replied, and stood looking at him with almost childish wonder.

At this moment, Nan, who knew by heart all the little tricks of friendship and affection, left Margaret, and took her stand by Neighbour Tomlin's side. It was an indorsement that the other could not withstand. She followed Nan, and said very firmly and earnestly, "It shall be as my mother wishes."

"I hope you will never have cause to regret it," remarked Pulaski Tomlin solemnly.

"She never will," Nan declared emphatically, as Pulaski Tomlin turned to go upstairs.

He went up very slowly, as if lost in thought. He went to the room and stood leaning against the framework of the door. "Pulaski is here," said Miss Fanny, who had been waiting to announce his return.

"You remember, Pulaski," the invalid began, "that

once when you were ill, you would not permit me to see you. I was so ignorant that I was angry; yes, and bitter; my vanity was wounded. And I was ignorant and bitter for many years. I never knew until eighteen months ago why I was not permitted to see you. I knew it one day, after I had been ill a long time. I looked in the mirror and saw my wasted face and hollow eyes. I knew then, and if I had known at first, Pulaski, everything would have been so different. I have come all this terrible journey to ask you to take my daughter and care for her. It is my last wish that you should be her guardian and protector. Is she in the room? Can she hear what I am about to say?"

"No, Margaret," replied Pulaski Tomlin, in a voice that was tremulous and husky. "She is downstairs; I have just seen her."

"Well, she has no father according to my way of thinking," Margaret Bridalbin went on. "Her father is a deserter from the Confederate army. She doesn't know that; I tried to tell her, but my heart failed me. Neither does she know that I have been divorced from him. These things you can tell her when the occasion arises. If I had told her, it would have been like accusing myself. I was responsible—I felt it and feel it—and I simply could not tell her."

"I shall try to carry out your wishes, Margaret," said Pulaski Tomlin; "I have seen your daughter, as Fanny suggested, and she has no objection to the arrangement. I shall do all that you desire. She shall be to me a most sacred charge."

"If you knew how happy you are making me, Pulaski—Oh, I am grateful—grateful!"

"There should be no talk of gratitude between you and me, Margaret."

At a signal from Pulaski Tomlin, Judge Odom cleared his throat, and read the document that he had drawn up, and his strong, business-like voice went far toward relieving the strain that had been put on those who heard the conversation between the dying woman and the man who had formerly been her lover. Everything was arranged as she desired, every wish she expressed had been carried out; and then, as if there was nothing else to be done, the poor lady closed her eyes with a sigh, and opened them no more in this world. It seemed that nothing had sustained her but the hope of placing her daughter in charge of Pulaski Tomlin.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Silas Tomlin Goes A-Calling

WHEN the solemn funeral ceremonies were over, it was arranged that Nan should spend a few days with her new friend, Margaret Gaither—she was never called by the name of her father after her mother died—and Gabriel took advantage of Nan's temporary absence to pay a visit to Mrs. Absalom. He was very fond of that strong-minded woman; but since Nan had grown to be such a young lady, he had not called as often as he had been in the habit of doing. He was afraid, indeed, that some one would accuse him of a sneaking desire to see Nan, and he was also afraid of the quizzing which Nan's father was always eager to apply. But with Nan away—her absence being notorious, as you may say—Gabriel felt that he could afford to call on the genial housekeeper.

Mrs. Absalom had for years been the manager of the Dorrington household, and she retained her place even after Randolph Dorrington had taken for his second wife Zepherine Dion, who had been known as Miss Johns, and who was now called Mrs. Johnny Dorrington. In that household, indeed, Mrs. Absalom was indispensable, and it was very fortunate that she and Mrs.

Johnny were very fond of each other. Her maiden name was Margaret Rorick, and she came of a family that had long been attached to the Dorringtons. In another clime, and under a different system, the Roricks would have been described as retainers. They were that and much more. They served without fee or reward. They were retainers in the highest and best sense; for, in following the bent of their affections, they retained their independence, their simple dignity and their self-respect; and in that region, which was then, and is now, the most democratic in the world, they were as well thought of as the Cloptons or the Dorringtons.

It came to pass, in the order of events, that Margaret Rorick married Mr. Absalom Goodlett, who was the manager of the Dorrington plantation. Though she was no chicken, as she said herself, Mr. Goodlett was her senior by several years. She was also, in a sense, the victim of the humour that used to run riot in Middle Georgia; for, in spite of her individuality, which was vigorous and aggressive, she lost her own name and her husband's too. At Margaret Rorick's wedding, or, rather, at the infair, which was the feast after the wedding, Mr. Uriah Lazenby, whose memory is kept green by his feats at tippling, and who combined fiddling with farming, furnished the music for the occasion. Being something of a privileged character, and having taken a thimbleful too much dram, as fiddlers will do, the world over, Mr. Lazenby rose in his place, when the company had been summoned to the feast, and remarked:

"Margaret Rorick, now that the thing's been gone

and done, and can't be holp, I nominate you Mrs. Absalom, an' Mrs. Absalom it shall be hereafter. Ab Goodlett, you ought to be mighty proud when you can fling your bridle on a filly like that, an' lead her home jest for the bar' sesso."

The loud laughter that followed placed the bride at a temporary disadvantage. She joined in, however, and then exclaimed: "My goodness! Old Uriah's drunk ag'in; you can't pull a stopper out'n a jug in the same house wi' him but what he'll dribble at the mouth an' git shaky in the legs."

But drunk or sober, Uriah had "nominated" Mrs. Absalom for good and all. One reason why this "nomination" was seized on so eagerly was the sudden change that had taken place in Miss Rorick's views in regard to matrimony. She was more than thirty years old when she consented to become Mrs. Absalom. Up to that time she had declared over and over again that there wasn't a man in the world she'd look at, much less marry.

Now, many a woman has said the same thing and changed her mind without attracting attention; but Mrs. Absalom's views on matrimony, and her pithy criticisms of the male sex in general, had flown about on the wings of her humour, and, in that way, had come to have wide advertisement. But her "nomination" interfered neither with her individuality, nor with her ability to indulge in pithy comments on matters and things in general. Of Mr. Lazenby, she said later: "What's the use of choosin' betwixt a fool an' a fiddler, when you can git both in the same package?"

She made no bad bargain when she married Mr. Goodlett. His irritability was all on the surface. At bottom, he was the best-natured and most patient of men—a philosopher who was so thoroughly contented with the ways of the world and the order of Providence, that he had no desire to change either—and so comfortable in his own views and opinions that he was not anxious to convert others to his way of thinking. If anything went wrong, it was like a garment turned inside out; it would "come out all right in the washin'."

Mrs. Absalom's explanation of her change of views in the subject of matrimony was very simple and reasonable. "Why, a single 'oman," she said, "can't cut no caper at all; she can't hardly turn around wi'out bein' plumb tore to pieces by folks's tongues. But now—you see Ab over there? Well, he ain't purty enough for a centre-piece, nor light enough for to be set on the mantel-shelf, but it's a comfort to see him in that cheer there, knowin' all the time that you can do as you please, and nobody dastin to say anything out of the way. Why, I could put on Ab's old boots an' take his old buggy umbrell, an' go an' jine the muster. The men might snicker behind the'r han's, but all they could say would be, 'Well, ef that kind of a dido suits Ab Goodlett, it ain't nobody else's business.'"

It happened that Mr. Sanders was the person to whom Mrs. Absalom was addressing her remarks, and he inquired if such an unheard of proceeding would be likely to suit Mr. Goodlett.

"To a t!" she exclaimed. "Why, he wouldn't bat

his eye. He mought grunt an' groan a little jest to let you know that he's alive, but that'd be all. An' that's the trouble: ef Ab has any fault in the world that you can put your finger on, it's in bein' too good. You know, William—anyhow, you'd know it ef you belonged to my seck—that there's lots of times and occasions when it'd make the wimmen folks feel lots better ef they had somethin' or other to rip and rare about. My old cat goes about purrin', the very spit and image of innocence; but she'd die ef she didn't show her claws sometimes. Once in awhile I try my level best for to pick a quarrel wi' Ab, but before I say a dozen words, I look at him an' have to laugh. Why the way that man sets there an' says nothin' is enough to make a saint ashamed of hisself."

It was the general opinion that Mr. Goodlett, who was shrewd and far-seeing beyond the average, had an eye to strengthening his relations with Dr. Dorrington, when he "popped the question" to Margaret Rorick. But such was not the case. His relations needed no strengthening. He managed Dorrington's agricultural interests with uncommon ability, and brought rare prosperity to the plantation. Unlettered, and, to all appearances, taking no interest in public affairs, he not only foresaw the end of the Civil War, but looked forward to the time when the Confederate Government, pressed for supplies, would urge upon the States the necessity of limiting the raising of cotton.

He gave both Meriwether Clopton and Neighbour Tomlin the benefit of these views; and then, when the

rumours of Sherman's march through Georgia grew rifer he made a shrewd guess as to the route, and succeeded in hiding out and saving, not only all the cotton the three plantations had grown, but also all the live-stock. Having an ingrained suspicion of the negroes, and entertaining against them the prejudices of his class, Mr. Goodlett employed a number of white boys from the country districts to aid him with his refugee train. And he left them in charge of the camp he had selected, knowing full well that they would be glad to remain in hiding as long as the Federal soldiers were about.

The window of the dining-room at Dorringtons' commanded a view of the street for a considerable distance toward town, and it was at this window that Mrs. Absalom had her favourite seat. She explained her preference for it by saying that she wanted to know what was going on in the world. She looked out from this window one day while she was talking to Gabriel Tolliver, whose visits to Dorringtons' had come to be coincident with Nan's absence, and suddenly exclaimed:

"Well, my gracious! Ef yonder ain't old Picayune Pauper! I wonder what we have done out this way that old Picayune should be sneakin' around here? I'll tell you what—ef Ab has borried arry thrip from old Silas Tomlin, I'll quit him; I won't live wi' a man that'll have anything to do wi' that old scamp. As I'm a livin' human, he's comin' here!"

Now, Silas Tomlin was Neighbour Tomlin's elder brother, but the two men were as different in character

and disposition as a warm bright day is different from a bitter black night. Pulaski Tomlin gave his services freely to all who needed them, and he was happy and prosperous; whereas Silas was a miserly money-lender and note-shaver, and always appeared to be in the clutches of adversity. To parsimony he added the sting —yes, and the stain—of a peevish and an irritable temper. It was as Mrs. Absalom had said—"a picayunish man is a pauper, I don't care how much money he's got."

"I'll go see ef Johnny is in the house," said Mrs. Absalom. "Johnny" was Mrs. Dorrington, who, in turn, called Mrs. Absalom "Nonny," which was Nan's pet name for the woman who had raised her—"I'll go see, but I lay she's gone to see Nan; I never before seed a step-mammy so wropped up in her husband's daughter." Nan, as has been said, was spending a few days with poor Margaret Bridalbin, whose mother had just been buried.

Mrs. Absalom called Mrs. Dorrington, and then looked for her, but she was not to be found at the moment. "I reckon you'll have to go to the door, Gabe," said Mrs. Absalom, as the knocker sounded. "Sence freedom, we ain't got as many niggers lazyin' around an' doin' nothin' as we use to have."

"Is Mr. Goodlett in?" asked Silas Tomlin, when Gabriel opened the door.

"I think he's in Malvern," Gabriel answered, as politely as he could.

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Silas Tomlin, with a terrible

frown; "you don't know a thing about it, not a thing in the world. He got back right after dinner."

"Well, ef he did," said Mrs. Absalom, coming forward, "he didn't come here. He ain't cast a shadow in this house sence day before yistiddy, when he went to Malvern."

"How are you, Mrs. Absalom?—how are you?" said Silas, with a tremendous effort at politeness. "I hope you are well; you are certainly looking well. You say your husband is not in? Well, I'm sorry; I wanted to see him on business; I wanted to get some information."

"Ab don't owe you anything, I hope," remarked Mrs. Absalom, ignoring the salutation.

"Not a thing—not a thing in the world. But why do you ask? Many people have the idea that I'm rolling in money—that's what I hear—and they think that I go about loaning it to Tom, Dick and Harry. But it is not so—it is not so; I have no money."

Mrs. Absalom laughed ironically, saying, "I reckon if your son Paul was to scratch about under the house, he'd find small change about in places."

Silas Tomlin looked hard at Mrs. Absalom, his little black eyes glistening under his coarse, heavy eyebrows like those of some wild animal. He was not a prepossessing man. He was so bald that he was compelled to wear a skull-cap, and the edge of this showed beneath the brim of his chimney-pot hat. His face needed a razor; and the grey beard coming through the cuticle, gave a ghastly, bluish tint to the pallor of his countenance. His broadcloth coat—Mrs. Absalom called it a "shad-

belly"—was greasy at the collar, and worn at the seams, and his waistcoat was stained with ambeer. His trousers, which were much too large for him, bagged at the knees, and his boots were run down at the heels. Though he was temperate to the last degree, he had the appearance of a man who is the victim of some artificial stimulant.

"What put that idea in your head, Mrs. Goodlett?" he asked, after looking long and searchingly at Mrs. Absalom.

"Well, I allowed that when you was countin' out your cash, a thrip or two mought have slipped through the cracks in the floor," she replied; "sech things have happened before now."

He wiped his thin lips with his lean forefinger, and stood hesitating, whereupon Mrs. Absalom remarked: "It sha'n't cost you a cent ef you'll come in. Ab'll be here purty soon ef somebody ain't been fool enough to give him his dinner. His health'll fail him long before his appetite does. Show Mr. Tomlin in the parlour, Gabriel, an' I'll see about Ab's dinner; I don't want it to burn to a cracklin' before he gits it."

Silas Tomlin went into the parlour and sat down, while Gabriel stood hesitating, not knowing what to do or say. He was embarrassed, and Silas Tomlin saw it. "Oh, take a seat," he said, with a show of impatience. "What are you doing for yourself, Tolliver? You're a big boy now, and you ought to be making good money. We'll all have to work now: we'll have to buckle right down to it. The way I look at it, the man who is doing

nothing is throwing money away; yes, sir, throwing it away. What does Adam Smith say? Why, he says——"

Gabriel never found out what particular statement of Adam Smith was to be thrown at his head, for at that moment, Mr. Goodlett called out from the dining-room: "Si Tomlin in there, Gabriel? Well, fetch him out here whar I live at. I ain't got no parlours for company." By the time that Gabriel had led Mr. Silas Tomlin into the dining-room, Mr. Goodlett had a plate of victuals carrying it to the kitchen; and he remarked as he went along, "I got nuther parlours nor dinin'-rooms: fetch him out here to the kitchen whar we both b'long at."

If Silas Tomlin objected to this arrangement, he gave no sign; he followed without a word, Mr. Goodlett placed his plate on the table where the dishes were washed, and dropped his hat on the floor beside him, and began to attack his dinner most vigorously. Believing, evidently, that ordinary politeness would be wasted here, Silas entered at once on the business that had brought him to Dorringtons'.

"Sorry to trouble you, Goodlett," he said by way of making a beginning.

"I notice you ain't cryin' none to hurt," remarked Mr. Goodlett placidly. "An' ef you was, you'd be cryin' for nothin'. You ain't troublin' me a mite. Forty an' four like you can't trouble me."

"You'll have to excuse Ab," said Mrs. Goodlett, who had preceded Gabriel and Silas to the kitchen. "He's lost his cud, an' he won't be right well till he finds it

ag'in." She placed her hand over her mouth to hide her smiles.

Silas Tomlin paid no attention to this by-play. He stood like a man who is waiting an opportunity to get in a word.

"Goodlett, who were the ladies you brought from Malvern to-day?" His face was very serious.

"You know 'em lots better'n I do. The oldest seed you out in the field, an' she axed me who you mought be. I told her, bekaze I ain't got no secrets from my passengers, specially when they're good-lookin' an' plank down the'r money before they start. Arter I told 'em who you was, the oldest made you a mighty purty bow, but you wer'n't polite enough for to take off your hat. I dunno as I blame you much, all things considered. Then the youngest, she's the daughter, she says, says she, 'Is that reely him, ma?' an' t'other one, says she, 'Ef it's him, honey, he's swunk turrible.' She said them very words."

"I wonder who in the world they can be?" said Silas Tomlin, as if talking to himself.

"You'll think of the'r names arter awhile," Mr. Goodlett remarked by way of consolation, but his tone was so suspicious that Silas turned on his heel—he had started out—and asked Mr. Goodlett what he meant.

"Adzackly what I said, nuther more nor less."

Mrs. Absalom was so curious to find out something more that Silas was hardly out of the house before she began to ply her husband with questions. But they were all futile. Mr. Goodlett knew no more than that

he had brought the women from Malvern; that they had chanced to spy old Silas Tomlin in a field by the side of the road, and that when the elder of the two women found out what his name was, she made him a bow, which Silas wasn't polite enough to return.

"That's all I know," remarked Mr. Goodlett. "Dog take the wimmen anyhow!" he exclaimed indignantly; "ef they'd stay at home they'd be all right; but here they go, a-trapesin' an' a-trollopin' all over creation, an' a-givin' trouble wherever they go. They git me so muddled an' befuddled wi' ther whickerin' an' snickerin' that I dunner which een' I'm a-stannin' on half the time. Nex' time they want to ride wi' me, I'll say, 'Walk!' By jacks! I won't haul 'em."

This episode, if it may be called such, made small impression on Gabriel's mind, but it tickled Mrs. Goodlett's mind into activity, and the lad heard more of Silas Tomlin during the next hour than he had ever known before. In a manner, Silas was a very important factor in the community, as money-lenders always are, but according to Gabriel's idea, he was always one of the poorest creatures in the world.

When he was a young man, Silas joined the tide of emigration that was flowing westward. He went to Mississippi, where he married his first wife. In a year's time, he returned to his old home. When asked about his wife—for he returned alone—he curtly answered that she was well enough off. Mrs. Absalom was among those who made the inquiry, and her prompt comment was, "She's well off ef she's dead; I'll say that much."

But there was a persistent rumour, coming from no one knew where, that when a child was born to Silas, the wife was seized with such a horror of the father that the bare sight of him would cause her to scream, and she constantly implored her people to send him away. It is curious how rumours will travel far and wide, from State to State, creeping through swamps, flying over deserts and waste places, and coming home at last as the carrier-pigeon does, especially if there happens to be a grain of truth in them.

It turned out that the lady, in regard to whom Silas Tomlin expressed such curiosity, was a Mrs. Claiborne, of Kentucky, who, with her daughter, had refugeed from point to point in advance of the Federal army. Finally, when peace came, the lady concluded to make her home in Georgia, where she had relatives, and she selected Shady Dale as her place of abode on account of its beauty. These facts became known later.

Evidently the new-comers had resources, for they arranged to occupy the Gaither house, taking it as it stood, with Miss Polly Gaither, furniture and all. This arrangement must have been satisfactory to Miss Polly in the first place, or it would never have been made; and it certainly relieved her of the necessity of living on the charity of her neighbours, under pretence of borrowing from them. But so strange a bundle of contradictions is human nature, that no sooner had Miss Polly begun to enjoy the abundance that was now showered upon her in the shape of victuals and drink than she took her ear-trumpet in one hand and her work-bag in the other, and went abroad, gossiping about her tenants, telling what

she thought they said, and commenting on their actions —not maliciously, but simply with a desire to feed the curiosity of the neighbours.

In order to do this more effectually, Miss Polly returned visits that had been made to her before the war. There was nothing in her talk to discredit the Claibornes or to injure their characters. They were strangers to the community, and there was a natural and perfectly legitimate curiosity on the part of the town to learn something of their history. Miss Polly could not satisfy this curiosity, but she could whet it by leaving at each one's door choice selections from her catalogue of the sayings and doings of the new-comers—wearing all the time a dress that Miss Eugenia, the daughter, had made over for her. Miss Polly was a dumpy little woman, and, with her wen, her ear-trumpet, and her work-bag, she cut a queer figure as she waddled along.

There was one piece of information she gave out that puzzled the community no little. According to Miss Polly, the Claibornes had hardly settled themselves in their new home before Silas Tomlin called on them. "I can't hear as well as I used to," said Miss Polly—she was deaf as a door-post—"but I can see as well as anybody; yes indeed, as well as anybody in the world. And I tell you, Lucy Lumsden"—she was talking to Gabriel's grandmother—"as soon as old Silas darkened the door, I knew he was worried. I never saw a grown person so fidgety and nervous, unless it was Micajah Clemmons, and he's got the rickets, poor man. So I says to myself, 'I'll watch you,' and watch I did. Well, when Mrs. Claiborne came into the parlour, she bowed very politely

to old Silas, but I could see that she could hardly keep from laughing in his face; and I don't blame her, for the way old Silas went on was perfectly ridiculous. He spit and he spluttered, and sawed the air with his arms, and buttoned and unbuttoned his coat, and jerked at the bottom of his wescut till I really thought he'd pull the front out. I wish you could have seen him, Lucy Lumsden, I do indeed. And when the door was shut on him, Mrs. Claiborne flung herself down on a sofa, and laughed until she frightened her daughter. I don't complain about my afflictions as a general thing, Lucy, but I would have given anything that day if my hearing had been as good as it used to be."

And though Gabriel's grandmother was a woman of the highest principles, holding eavesdropping in the greatest contempt, it is possible that she would have owned to a mild regret that Miss Polly Gaither was too deaf to hear what Silas Tomlin's troubles were. This was natural, too, for, on account of the persistent rumours that had followed Silas home from Mississippi, there was always something of a mystery in regard to his first matrimonial venture. There was none about his second. A year or two after he returned home he married Susan Pritchard, whose father was a prosperous farmer, living several miles from town. Susan bore Silas a son and died. She was a pious woman, and with her last breath named the child Paul, on account of the conjunction of the names of Paul and Silas in the New Testament. Paul grew up to be one of the most popular young men in the community.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Political Machine Begins its Work

ALL that has been set down thus far, you will say, is trifling, unimportant and wearisome. Your decision is not to be disputed; but if, by an effort of the mind, you could throw yourself back to those dread days, you would understand what a diversion these trifling events and episodes created for the heart-stricken and soul-weary people of that region. The death of Margaret Bridalbin moved them to pity, and awoke in their minds pleasing memories of happier days, when peace and prosperity held undisputed sway in all directions. The arrival of the Claibornes had much the same effect. It gave the community something to talk about, and, in a small measure, took them out of themselves. Moreover, the Claibornes, mother and daughter, proved to be very attractive additions to the town's society. They were both bright and good-humoured, and the daughter was very beautiful.

To a people overwhelmed with despair, the most trifling episode becomes curiously magnified. The case of Mr. Goodlett is very much to the point. He was merely an individual, it is true, but in some respects an individual represents the mass. When Sherman's men

hanged him to a limb, under the mistaken notion that he was the custodian of the Clopton plate, the last thing he remembered as he lost consciousness, was the ticking of his watch. It sounded in his ears, he said, as loud as the blows of a sledge-hammer falling on an anvil. From that day until he died, he never could bear to hear the ticking of a watch. He gave his time-piece to his wife, who put it away with her other relics and treasures.

How it was with other communities it is not for this chronicler to say, but the collapse of the Confederacy, coming when it did, was an event that Shady Dale least expected. The last trump will cause no greater surprise and consternation the world over, than the news of Lee's surrender caused in that region. The public mind had not been prepared for such an event, especially in those districts remote from the centres of information. Almost every piece of news printed in the journals of the day was coloured with the prospect of ultimate victory: and when the curtain suddenly came down and the lights went out, no language can describe the grief, the despair, and the feeling of abject humiliation that fell upon the white population in the small towns and village communities. How it was in the cities has not been recorded, but it is to be presumed that then, as now, the demands and necessities of trade and business were powerful enough to overcome and destroy the worst effects of a calamity that attacked the sentiments and emotions.

It has been demonstrated recently on some very wide fields of action that the atmosphere of commercialism

is unfavourable to the growth of sentiments of an ideal character. That is why wise men who believe in the finer issues of life are inclined to be suspicious of what is loosely called civilisation and progress, and doubtful of the theories of those who clothe themselves in the mantle of science.

Whatever the feeling in the cities may have been when news of the surrender came, it caused the most poignant grief and despair in the country places: and there, as elsewhere in this world, whenever suffering is to be borne, the most of the burden falls on the shoulders of the women. It is at once the strength and weakness of the sex that woman suffers more than man and is more capable of enduring the pangs of suffering.

As for the men they soon recovered from the shock. They were startled and stunned, but when they opened their eyes to the situation they found themselves confronted by conditions that had no precedent or parallel in the history of the world. It is small fault if their minds failed at first to grasp the significance and the import of these conditions, so new were they and so amazing.

A few years later, Gabriel Tolliver, who, when the surrender came, was a lad just beyond seventeen, took himself severely to task before a public assemblage for his blindness in 1865, and the years immediately following; and his criticisms must have gone home to others, for the older men who sat in the audience rose to their feet and shook the house with their applause. They, too, had been as blind as the boy.

It was perhaps well for Shady Dale that Mr. Sanders came home when he did. He had been in the field, if not on the forum. He had mingled with public men, and, as he himself contended, had been "closeted" with one of the greatest men the country ever produced—the reference being to Mr. Lincoln. Mr. Sanders had to tell over and over again the story of how he and Frank Bethune didn't kidnap the President; and he brought home hundreds of rich and racy anecdotes that he had picked up in the camp. In those awful days when there was little ready money to be had, and business was at a standstill, and the courts demoralised, and the whole social fabric threatening to fall to pieces, it was Mr. Billy Sanders who went around scattering cheerfulness and good-humour as carelessly as the children scatter the flowers they have gathered in the fields.

Mr. Sanders and Francis Bethune had formed a part of the escort that went with Mr. Davis as far as Washington in Wilkes County. On this account, Mr. Sanders boasted that at the last meeting of the Confederate Cabinet held in that town, he had elected himself a member, and was duly installed. "It was the same," he used to say, "as j'inin' the Free-masons. The door-keeper gi' me the grip an' the pass-word, the head man of the war department knocked me on the forrerd, an' the thing was done. When Mr. Davis was ready to go, he took me by the hand, an' says, 'William,' says he, 'keep house for the boys till I git back, an' be shore that you cheer 'em up.'"

This sort of nonsense served its purpose, as Mr.

Sanders intended that it should. Wherever he appeared on the streets a crowd gathered around him—as large a crowd as the town could furnish. To a spectator standing a little distance away and out of hearing, the attitude and movements of these groups presented a singular appearance. The individuals would move about and swap places, trying to get closer to Mr. Sanders. There would be a period of silence, and then, suddenly, loud shouts of laughter would rend the air. Such a spectator, if a stranger, might easily have imagined that these men and boys, standing close together, and shouting with laughter at intervals, were engaged in practising a part to be presented in a rural comedy—or that they were a parcel of simpletons.

One peculiarity of Mr. Sanders's humour was that it could not be imitated with any degree of success. His raciest anecdote lost a large part of its flavour when repeated by some one else. It was the way he told it, a cut of the eye, a lift of the eyebrow, a movement of the hand, a sudden air of solemnity—these were the accessories that gave point and charm to the humour.

Mr. Sanders had cut out a very large piece of work for himself. He kept it up for some time, but he gradually allowed himself longer and longer intervals of seriousness. The multitude of problems growing out of the new and strange conditions were of a thought-compelling nature; and they grew larger and more ominous as the days went by. Gabriel Tolliver might take to the woods, as the saying is, and so escape from the prevailing depression. But Mr. Sanders and the rest of

the men had no such resource; responsibility sat on their shoulders, and they were compelled to face the conditions and study them. Gabriel could sit on the fence by the roadside, and see neither portent nor peril in the groups and gangs of negroes passing and repassing, and moving restlessly to and fro, some with bundles and some with none. He watched them, as he afterward complained, with a curiosity as idle as that which moves a little child to watch a swarm of ants. He noticed, however, that the negroes were no longer cheerful. Their child-like gaiety had vanished. In place of their loud laughter, their boisterous play, and their songs welling forth and filling the twilight places with sweet melodies, there was silence. Gabriel had no reason to regard this silence as ominous, but it was so regarded by his elders.

He thought that the restless and uneasy movements of the negroes were perfectly natural. They had suddenly come to the knowledge that they were free, and they were testing the nature and limits of their freedom. They desired to find out its length and its breadth. So much was clear to Gabriel, but it was not clear to his elders. And what a pity that it was not! How many mistakes would have been avoided! What a dreadful tangle and turmoil would have been prevented if these grown children could have been judged from Gabriel's point of view! For the boy's interpretation of the restlessness and uneasiness of the blacks was the correct one. Your historians will tell you that the situation was extraordinary and full of peril. Well, extraordinary, if you

will, but not perilous. Gabriel could never be brought to believe that there was anything to be dreaded in the attitude of the blacks. What he scored himself for in the days to come was that his interest in the matter never rose above the idle curiosity of a boy.

And yet there were some developments calculated to pique curiosity. A few years before the war, one of Madame Awtry's nephews from Massachusetts came in to the neighbourhood preaching freedom to the negroes. As a result, a large body of the Clopton negroes gathered around the house one morning with many breathings and mutterings. Uncle Plato, the carriage-driver, went to his master with a very grave face, and announced that the hands, instead of going to work, had come in a body to the house.

"Well, go and see what they want, Plato," said the master of the Clopton Place.

"I done ax um dat, suh," replied Uncle Plato, "an' dey say p'intedly dat dey want ter see you."

"Very well; where is Mr. Sanders?"

"He out dar, suh, makin' fun un um."

When Meriwether Clopton went out, he was told by old man Isaiah, the foreman of the field-hands, that the boys didn't want to be "Bledserd." It was some time before the master could understand what the old man meant, but Mr. Sanders finally made it clear, and Meriwether Clopton sent the negroes about their business with a promise that none of them should ever be "Bledserd" by his consent.

A year or two before this "rising" occurred, Gen-

eral Jesse Bledsoe had died leaving a will, by the terms of which all his negroes were given their freedom, and provision was made for their transportation to a free State. But the General had relatives, who put in their claims, and succeeded in breaking the will, with the result that many of the negroes were carried to the West and Southwest, bringing about a wholesale separation of families, the first that had ever occurred in that section. The impression it made on both whites and negroes was a lasting one. In the minds of the blacks, freedom was only another name for "Bledserin'."

Nevertheless, when, after the collapse of the Confederacy and the advent of Sherman's army, the Clopton negroes were told that they were free, a large number of them joined the restless, migratory throng that passed to and fro along the public highway, some coming, some going, but all moved by the same irresistible impulse to test their freedom—to see if they really could come hither and go yonder without let or hinderance. Uncle Plato and his family, with a dozen others who were sagacious enough to follow the old man's example, remained in their places and fared better than the rest.

For a time Shady Dale rested peacefully in its seclusion, watching the course of events with apparent tranquillity. But behind this appearance of repose there was a good deal of restlessness and uneasiness. Sometimes its bosom (so to speak) was inflamed with anger, and sometimes it would be sunk in despair. One of the events that brought Shady Dale closer to the troubles that the newspapers were full of, was a circular letter issued by

Major Tomlin Perdue, of Halcyondale. Major Perdue had returned home thoroughly reconstructed. He was full of admiration for General Grant's attitude toward General Lee, and he endorsed with all his heart the tone and spirit of Lee's address to his old soldiers; but when he saw the unexpected turn that the politicians had been able to give to events, he found it hard to hold his peace. Finally, when he could restrain himself no longer, he incited his friends to hold a meeting and propose his name as a candidate for Congress. This was done, and the Major seized the opportunity to issue a circular letter declining the nomination, and giving his reasons therefor. This letter remains to this day the most scathing arraignment of carpet-baggery, bayonet rule, and the Republican Party generally that has ever been put in print. It contained some decidedly picturesque references to the personality of the commander of the Georgia district, who happened to be General Pope, the famous soldier who had his head-quarters in the saddle at a very interesting period of the Civil War.

Major Perdue did not intend it so, but his letter was a piece of pure recklessness. The effect of this scorching document was to bring a company of Federal troops to Halcyondale, and in the course of a few weeks a detachment was stationed at Shady Dale. In each case they brought their tents with them, and went into camp. This was taken as a signal by the carpet-baggers that the region round-about was to be cultivated for political purposes, and forthwith they began operations, receiving occasional accessions in the person of a number of

scalawags, the most respectable and conscientious of these being Mr. Mahlon Butts, who had been a vigorous and consistent Union man all through the war. He could be neither convinced nor intimidated, and his consistency won for him the respect of his neighbours. But when the carpet-baggers made their appearance, and Mahlon Butts began to fraternise with them, he was ostracised along with the rest.

It soon became necessary for the whites to take counsel together, and Shady Dale became, as it had been before the war, the Mecca of the various leaders. Before the war, the politicians of both parties were in the habit of meeting at Shady Dale, enjoying the barbecues for which the town was famous, and taking advantage of the occasion to lay out the programme of the campaign. And now, when it was necessary to organise a white man's party, the leaders turned their eyes and their steps to Shady Dale.

Then it was that Gabriel had an opportunity to see Toombs, and Stephens, and Hill, and Herschel V. Johnson—he who was on the national ticket with Douglas in 1860—and other men who were to become prominent later. There were some differences of opinion to be settled. A few of the leaders had advised the white voters to take no part in the political farce which Congress had arranged, but to leave it all to the negroes and the aliens, especially as so many of the white voters had been disfranchised, or were labouring under political disabilities. Others, on the contrary, advised the white voters to qualify as rapidly as possible. It was this difference of opin-

ion that remained to be settled, so far as Georgia was concerned.

It was Gabriel's acquaintance with Mr. Stephens that first fired his ambition. Here was a frail, weak man, hardly able to stand alone, who had been an invalid all his life, and yet had won renown, and by his wisdom and conservatism had gained the confidence and esteem of men of all parties and of all shades of opinion. His will-power and his energy lifted him above his bodily weakness and ills, and carried him through some of the most arduous campaigns that ever occurred in Georgia, where heated canvasses were the rule and not the exception. Watching him closely, and noting his wonderful vivacity and cheerfulness, Gabriel Tolliver came to the conclusion that if an invalid could win fame a strong healthy lad should be able to make his mark.

It fell out that Gabriel attracted the attention of Mr. Stephens, who was always partial to young men. He made the lad sit near him, drew him out, and gave him some sound advice in regard to his studies. At the suggestion of Mr. Stephens, the lad was permitted to attend the conferences, which were all informal, and the kindly statesman took pains to introduce the awkward, blushing youngster to all the prominent men who came.

It was curious, Gabriel thought, how easily and naturally the invalid led the conversation into the channel he desired. He was smoking a clay pipe, which his faithful body-servant replenished from time to time. "Mr. Sanders," he began, "I have heard a good deal about

your attempt to kidnap Lincoln. What did you think of Lincoln anyhow?"

"Well, sir, I thought, an' still think that he was the best all-'round man I ever laid eyes on."

"He certainly was a very great man," remarked Mr. Stephens. "I knew him well before the war. We were in Congress together. It is odd that he showed no remarkable traits at that time."

"Well," replied Mr. Sanders, "arter the Dimmycrats elected him President, he found hisself in a corner, an' he jest had to be a big man."

"You mean after the Republicans elected him," some one suggested.

"Not a bit of it,—not a bit of it!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders. "Why the Republicans didn't have enough votes to elect three governors, much less a President. But the Dimmycrats, bein' perlite by natur' an' not troubled wi' any surplus common sense, divided up the'r votes, an' the Republicans walked in an' took the cake. If you ever hear of me votin' the Dimmycrat ticket—an' I reckon I'll have to do it—you may jest put it down that it ain't bekase I want to, but bekase I'm ableege to. The party ain't hardly got life left in it, an' yit here you big men are wranglin' an' jowerin' as to whether you'll set down an' let a drove of mules run over you, or whether you'll stan' up to the rack, fodder or no fodder."

"This brings us to the very point we are to discuss," said Mr. Stephens, laughing. "I may say in the beginning that I am much of Mr. Sanders's opinion. Some very able men insist that if we take no part in this recon-

struction business, we'll not be responsible for it. That is true, but we will have to endure the consequences just the same. Radicalism has majorities at present, but these will disappear after a time."

"I reckon some of us can be trusted to wear away a few majorities," said Mr. Sanders, dryly, and it was his last contribution to the discussion. As might be supposed, no definite policy was hit upon. The conditions were so new to those who had to deal with them, that, after an interchange of views, the company separated, feeling that the policy proper to be pursued would arise naturally out of the immediate necessities of the occasion, or the special character of the situation This was the view of Mr. Stephens, who, as he was still suffering from his confinement in prison, accepted the invitation of Meriwether Clopton to remain at Shady Dale for a week or more.

During that week, there was hardly a day that Gabriel did not go to the Clopton Place. He went because he could see that his presence was agreeable to Mr. Stephens, as well as to Meriwether Clopton. He was led along to join in the conversation which the older men were carrying on, and in that way he gained more substantial information about political principles and policies than he could have found in the books and the newspapers.

Moreover, Gabriel came in closer contact with Francis Bethune. That young gentleman seized the opportunity to invite Gabriel to his room, where they had several familiar and pleasant talks. Bethune told Gabriel much

that was interesting about the war, and about the men he had met in Richmond and Washington. He also related many interesting incidents and stories of adventure, in which he had taken part. But he never once put himself forward as the hero of an exploit. On the contrary, he was always in the background; invariably, it was some one else to whom he gave the credit of success, taking upon himself the responsibility of the failures.

Gabriel had never suspected this proud-looking young man of modesty, and he at once began to admire and like Bethune, who was not only genial, but congenial. He seemed to take a real interest in Gabriel, and gave him a good deal of sober advice which he should have taken himself.

"I'll never be anything but plain Bethune," he said to Gabriel. "I'd like to do something or be something for the sake of those who have had the care of me; but it isn't in me. I don't know why, but the other fellow gets there first when there's something to be won. And when I am first it leads to trouble. Take my college scrape; you've heard about it, no doubt. Well, the boys there have been playing poker ever since there was a college, and they'll play it as long as the college remains; but the first game I was inveigled into, the Chancellor walked in upon us while I was shuffling the cards, and stood at my back and heard me cursing the others because they had suddenly turned to their books. 'That will do, Mr. Bethune,' said the Chancellor; 'we have had enough profanity for to-night.' Well, that has been the way all through. I wanted to win rank in the army

—and I did; I ranked everybody as the king-bee of insubordination. That isn't all. Take my gait—the way I walk; everybody thinks I hold my head up and swagger because I am vain. But look at the matter with clear eyes, Tolliver; I walk that way because it is natural to me. As for vanity, what on earth have I to be vain of?"

"Well, you are young, you know," said Gabriel—"almost as young as I am; and though you have been unlucky, that is no sign that it will always be so."

"No, Tolliver, I am several years older than you. All your opportunities are still to come; and if I can do nothing myself, I should like to see you succeed. I have heard my grandfather say some fine things about you."

Now, such talk as that, when it carries the evidence of sincerity along with it, is bound to win a young fellow over; youth cannot resist it. Bethune won Gabriel, and won him completely. It was so pleasing to Gabriel to be able to have a cordial liking for Bethune that he had the feelings of those who gain a moral victory over themselves in the matter of some evil habit or passion. His grandmother smiled fondly on his enthusiasm, remarking:

"Yes, Gabriel; he is certainly a fine young gentleman, and I am glad of it for Nan's sake. He will be sure to make her happy, and she deserves happiness as much as any human being I ever knew."

Gabriel also thought that Nan deserved to be very happy, but he could imagine several forms of happiness

that did not include marriage with Bethune, however much he might admire his friend. And his enthusiastic praises of Bethune ceased so suddenly that his grandmother looked at him curiously. The truth is, her remarks about Nan and Bethune always gave Gabriel a cold chill. His grandmother was to him the fountain-head of wisdom, the embodiment of experience. When he was a bit of a lad, she used to untie all the hard knots, and untangle all the tangles that persisted in invading his large collection of string, cords and twines, and the ease with which she did this—for the knots seemed to come untied of their own accord, and the tangles to vanish as soon as her fingers touched them—gave Gabriel an impression of her ability that he never lost. Her word was law with him, though he had frequently broken the law, and her judgment was infallible.

CHAPTER NINE

Nan and Gabriel

GABRIEL renewed his enthusiasm for Bethune as soon as he had an opportunity to see Nan. These opportunities became rarer and rarer as the days went by. Sometimes she was friendly and familiar, as on the day when she went home with him to hear the story of poor Margaret Gaither; but oftener she was cool and dignified, and appeared to be inclined to patronise her old friend and comrade. This was certainly her attitude when Gabriel began to sing the praises of Francis Bethune when, on one occasion, he met her on the street.

"I'm sure it is very good of you, Gabriel, to speak so kindly of Mr. Bethune," she said. "No doubt he deserves it all. He also says some very nice things about you, so I've heard. Nonny says there's some sort of an agreement between you—'you tickle me and I'll tickle you.' Oh, there's nothing for you to blush about, Gabriel," she went on very seriously. "Nonny may laugh at it, but I think it speaks well for both you and Mr. Bethune."

Gabriel made no reply, and as he stood there looking at Nan, and realising for the first time what he had only dimly suspected before, that they could no longer

be comrades and chums, he presented a very uncomfortable spectacle. He was the picture of awkwardness. His hands and his feet were all in his way, and for the first time in his life he felt cheap. Nan had suddenly loomed up as a woman grown. It is true that she resolutely refused to follow the prevailing fashion and wear hoop-skirts, but this fact and her long dress simply gave emphasis to the fact that she was grown.

"Well, Nan, I'm very sorry," said Gabriel, by way of saying something. He spoke the truth without knowing why.

"Sorry! Why should you be sorry?" cried Nan. "I think you have everything to make you glad. You have your Mr. Bethune, and no longer than yesterday I heard Eugenia Claiborne say that you are the handsomest man she ever saw—yes, she called you a man. She declared that she never knew before that curly hair could be so becoming to a man. And Margaret says that you and Eugenia would just suit each other, she a blonde and you a brunette."

Gabriel blushed again in spite of himself, and laughed, too—laughed at the incongruity of the situation. This Nan, with her long gingham frock, and her serious ways, was no more like the Nan he had known than if she had come from another world. It was laughable, of course, and pathetic, too, for Gabriel could laugh and feel sorry at the same moment.

"You haven't told me why you are sorry," said Nan, when the lad's silence had become embarrassing to her.

"Well, I am just sorry," Gabriel replied.

"You are angry," she declared.

"No," he insisted, "I am just sorry. I don't know why, unless it's because you are not the same. You have been changing all the time, I reckon, but I never noticed it so much until to-day." His tone was one of complaint.

As Nan stood there regarding Gabriel with an expression of perplexity in her countenance, and tapping the ground impatiently with one foot, the two young people got their first whiff of the troubles that had been slowly gathering over that region. Around the corner near which they stood, two men had paused to finish an earnest conversation. Evidently they had been walking along, but their talk had become so interesting, apparently, that they paused involuntarily. They were hid from Nan and Gabriel by the high brick wall that enclosed Madame Awtry's back yard.

"As president of this league," said a voice which neither Nan nor Gabriel could recognise, "you will have great responsibility. I hope you realise it."

"I'm in hopes I does, suh," replied the other, whose voice there was no difficulty in recognising as that of the Rev. Jeremiah Tomlin.

"As you so aptly put it last night at your church, the bottom rail is now on top, and it will stay there if the coloured people know their own interests. Every dollar that has been made in the South during the parst two hundred years was made by the niggeroes and belongs to them."

"Dat is so, suh; dat is de Lord's trufe. I realise

dat, suh; an' I'll try fer ter make my people realize it," responded the Rev. Jeremiah.

"What you lack in experience," continued the first speaker, "you make up in numbers. It is important to remember that. Organise your race, get them together. impress upon them the necessity of acting as one man. Once organised, you will find leaders. All the arrangements have been made for that."

"I hears you, suh; an' b'lieves you," replied the Rev. Jeremiah with great ceremony.

"You have seen white men from a distance coming and going. Where did they go?"

"Dey went ter Clopton's, suh: right dar an' nowhars else. I seed um, suh, wid my own eyes."

"You don't know what they came for. Well, I will tell you: they came here to devise some plan by which they can deprive the niggeroes of the right to vote. Now, what do you suppose would be the simplest way to do this?" The Rev. Jeremiah made no reply. He was evidently waiting in awe to hear what the plan was. "You don't know," the first speaker went on to say; "well, I will tell you. They propose to re-enslave the coloured people. They propose to take the ballots out of their hands and put in their place, the hoe and the plough-handles. They propose to deprive you of the freedom bestowed upon you by the martyr President."

"You don't tell me, suh! Well, well!"

"Yes, that is their object, and they will undoubtedly succeed if your people do not organise, and stand together, and give their support to the Republican Party."

"I has b'longed ter de Erpublican Party, suh, sense fust I heard de name."

"We meet to-night in the school-house. Bring only a few—men whom you can trust, and the older they are the better."

"I ain't so right down suttin and sho' 'bout dat, suh. Some er de ol' ones is mighty sot in der ways; dey ain't got de l'arnin', suh, an' dey dunner what's good fer 'm. But I'll pick out some, suh; I'll try fer ter fetch de ones what'll do us de mos' good."

"Very well, Mr. Tommerlin; the old school-house is the place, and there'll be no lights that can be seen from the outside. Rap three times slowly, and twice quickly —so. The pass-word is——"

He must have whispered it, for no sound came to the ears of Nan and Gabriel. The latter motioned his head to Nan, and the two walked around the corner. As they turned Nan was saying, "You must go with me some day, and call on Eugenia Claiborne; she'll be delighted to see you—and she's just lovely."

What answer Gabriel made he never knew, so intently was he engaged in trying to digest what he had heard. The Rev. Jeremiah took off his hat and smiled broadly, as he gave Nan and Gabriel a ceremonious bow. They responded to his salute and passed on. The white man who had been talking to the negro was a stranger to both of them, though both came to know him very well —too well, in fact—a few months later. He had about him the air of a preacher, his coat being of the cut and colour of the garments worn by clergymen. His coun-

tenance was pale, but all his features, except his eyes, stood for energy and determination. The eyes were restless and shifty, giving him an appearance of uneasiness.

"What does he mean?" inquired Nan, when they were out of hearing.

"He means a good deal," replied Gabriel, who as an interested listener at the conferences of the white leaders, had heard several prominent men express fears that just such statements would be made to the negroes by the carpet-bag element; and now here was a man pouring the most alarming and exciting tidings into the ears of a negro on the public streets. True, he had no idea that any one but the Rev. Jeremiah was in hearing, but the tone of his voice was not moderated. What he said, he said right out.

"But what do you mean by a good deal?" Nan asked.

"You heard what he said," Gabriel answered, "and you must see what he is trying to do. Suppose he should convince the negroes that the whites are trying to put them back in slavery, and they should rise and kill the whites and burn all the houses?"

"Now, Gabriel, you know that is all nonsense," replied Nan, trying to laugh. In spite of her effort to smile at Gabriel's explanation, her face was very serious indeed.

"Yonder comes Miss Claiborne," said Gabriel. "Good-bye, Nan; I'm still sorry you are not as you used to be. I must go and see Mr. Sanders." With that, he turned out of the main street, and went running across the square.

"That child worries me," said Nan, uttering her thought aloud, and unconsciously using an expression she had often heard on Mrs. Absalom's tongue. "Did you see that great gawk of a boy?" she went on, as Eugenia Claiborne came up. "He hasn't the least dignity."

"Well, you should be glad of that, Nan," Eugenia suggested.

"I? Well, please excuse me. If there is anything I admire in other people, it is dignity." She straightened herself up and assumed such a serious attitude that Eugenia became convulsed with laughter.

"What did you do to Gabriel, Nan, that he should be running away from you at such a rate? Or did he run because he saw me coming?" Before Nan could make any reply, Eugenia seized her by both elbows—"And, oh, Nan! you know the Yankee captain who is in command of the Yankee soldiers here? Well, his name is Falconer, and mother says he is our cousin. And would you believe it, she wanted to ask him to tea. I cried when she told me; I never was so angry in my life. Why, I wouldn't stay in the same house nor eat at the same table with one who is an enemy of my country."

"Nor I either," said Nan with emphasis. "But he's very handsome."

"I don't care if he is," cried the other impulsively. "He has been killing our gallant young men, and depriving us of our liberties, and he's here now to help the negroes lord it over us."

"Oh, now I know what Gabriel intends to do!" ex-

claimed Nan, but she refused to satisfy Eugenia's curiosity, much to that young lady's discomfort. "I must go," said Nan, kissing her friend good-bye. Eugenia stood watching her until she was out of sight, and wondered why she was in such a hurry.

Nan had changed greatly in the course of two years, and, in some directions, not for the better, as some of the older ones thought and said. They remembered how charming she was in the days when she threw all conventions to the winds, and was simply a wild, sweet little rascal, engaged in performing the most unheard-of pranks, and cutting up the most impossible capers. Until Margaret Gaither and Eugenia Claiborne came to Shady Dale, Nan had no girl-friends. All the others were either ages too old or ages too young, or disagreeable, and Nan had to find her amusements the best way she could.

Margaret Gaither and Eugenia Claiborne had a very subduing effect upon Nan. They had been brought up with the greatest respect for all the small formalities and conventions, and the attention they paid to these really awed Nan. The young ladies were free and unconventional enough when there was no other eye to mark their movements, but at table, or in company, they held their heads in a certain way, and they had rules by which to seat themselves in a chair, or to rise therefrom; they had been taught how to enter a room, how to bow, and how to walk gracefully, as was supposed, from one side of a room to the other. Nan tried hard to learn a few of these conventions, but she never succeeded; she

never could conform to the rules; she always failed to remember them at the proper time; and it was very fortunate that this was so. The native grace with which she moved about could never have been imparted by rule; but there were long moments when her failure to conform weighed upon her mind, and subdued her.

This was a part of the change that Gabriel found in her. She could no longer, in justice to the rules of etiquette, seize Gabriel by the lapels of his coat and give him a good shaking when he happened to displease her, and she could no longer switch him across the face with her braided hair—that wonderful tawny hair, so fine, so abundant, so soft, and so warm-looking. No, indeed! the day for that was over, and very sorry she was for herself and for Gabriel, too.

And while she was going home, following in the footsteps of that young man (for Dorringtons' was on the way to Cloptons'), a thought struck her, and it seemed to be so important that she stopped still and clapped the palms of her hands together with an energy unusual to young ladies. Then she gathered her skirt firmly, drew it up a little, and went running along the road as rapidly as Gabriel had run. Fortunately, a knowledge of the rules of etiquette had not had the effect of paralysing Nan's legs. She ran so fast that she was wellnigh breathless when she reached home. She rushed into the house, and fell in a chair, crying:

"Oh, Nonny!"

CHAPTER TEN

The Troubles of Nan

"WHY, what on earth ails the child?" exclaimed Mrs. Absalom. Nan was leaning back in the chair, her face very red, making an effort to fan herself with one little hand, and panting wildly. "Malindy!" Mrs. Absalom yelled to the cook, "run here an' fetch the camphire as you come! Ain't you comin'? The laws a massy on us! the child'll be cold and stiff before you start! Honey, what on earth ails you? Tell your Nonny. Has anybody pestered you? Ef they have, jest tell me the'r name, an' I'll foller 'em to the jumpin'-off place but what I'll frail 'em out. You Malindy! whyn't you come on? You'll go faster'n that to your own funeral."

But when Malindy came with the camphor, and a dose of salts in a tumbler, Nan waved her away. "I don't want any physic, Nonny," she said, still panting, for her run had been a long one; "I'm just tired from running. And, oh, Nonny! I have something to tell you."

"Well, my life!" exclaimed Mrs. Absalom indignantly, withdrawing her arms from around Nan, and rising to her feet. "A little more, an' you'd 'a' had me ready for my coolin'-board. I ain't had such a turn

—not sence the day a nigger boy run in the gate an' tol' me the Yankees was a-hangin' Ab. An' all bekaze you've hatched out some rigamarole that nobody on the green earth would 'a' thought of but you."

She fussed around a little, and was for going about the various unnecessary duties she imposed on herself; but Nan protested. "Please, Nonny, wait until I tell you." Thereupon Nan told as well as she could of the conversation she and Gabriel had overheard in town, and the recital gave Mrs. Absalom a more serious feeling than she had had in many a day. Her muscular arms, bare to the elbow, were folded across her ample bosom, and she seemed to be glaring at Nan with a frown on her face, but she was thinking.

"Well," she said with a sigh, "I knowed there was gwine to be trouble of some kind—old Billy Sanders went by here this mornin' as drunk as a lord."

"Drunk!" cried Nan with blanched face.

"Well, sorter tollerbul how-come-you-so. The last time old Billy was drunk, was when sesaytion was fetched on. Ev'ry time he runs a straw in a jimmy-john, he fishes up trouble. An' my dream's out. I dremp last night that a wooden-leg man come to the door, an' ast me for a pair of shoes. I ast him what on earth he wanted wi' a pair, bein's he had but one foot. He said that the foot he didn't have was constant a-feelin' like it was cold, an' he allowed maybe it'd feel better ef it know'd that he had a shoe ready for it ag'in colder weather."

"Oh, I hate him! I just naturally despise him!"

cried Nan. When she was angry her face was pale, and it was very pale now.

"Why do you hate the wooden-leg man, honey? It was all in a dream," said Mrs. Absalom, soothingly.

"Oh, I don't know what you are talking about, Nonny!" exclaimed Nan, ready to cry. "I mean old Billy Sanders. And if I don't give him a piece of my mind when I see him. Now Gabriel will go to that place to-night, and he's nothing but a boy."

"A boy! well, I dunner where you'll find your men ef Gabriel ain't nothin' but a boy. Where's anybody in these diggin's that's any bigger or stouter? I wish you'd show 'em to me," remarked Mrs. Absalom.

"I don't care," Nan persisted; "I know just what Gabriel will do. He'll go to that place to-night, and—and—I'd rather go there myself."

"Well, my life!" exclaimed Mrs. Absalom, with lifted eyebrows.

The pallor of Nan's face was gradually replaced by a warmer glow. "Now, Nonny! don't say a word—don't tease—don't tease me about Gabriel. If you do, I'll never tell you anything more for ever and ever."

"All this is bran new to me," Mrs. Absalom declared. "You make me feel, Nan, like I was in some strange place, talkin' wi' some un I never seed before. You ain't no more like yourself—you ain't no more like you used to be—than day is like night, an' I'm jest as sorry as I can be."

"That's what Gabriel says," sighed Nan. "He said

he was sorry, and now you say you are sorry. Oh, Nonny, I don't want any one to be sorry for me."

"Well, then, behave yourself, an' be like you use to be, an' stop trollopin' aroun' wi' them highfalutin' gals downtown. They look like they know too much. All they talk about is boys, boys, boys, from mornin' till night; an' I noticed when they was spendin' a part of the'r time here that you was just as bad. It was six of one an' twice three of the rest. Now you know that ain't a sign of good health for gals to be eternally talkin' about boys, 'specially sech ganglin', lop-sided creeturs as we've got aroun' here."

"Where's Johnny?" asked Nan, who evidently had no notion of getting in a controversy with Mrs. Absalom on the subject of boys. "Johnny" was her name for her stepmother, whose surname of Dion had been changed to "Johns" the day after she arrived at Shady Dale. The story of little Miss Johns has been told in another place and all that is necessary to add to the record is the fact that she had managed to endear herself to the critical, officious, and somewhat jealous Mrs. Absalom. Mrs. Dorrington had the tact and the charm of the best of her race. She was Nan's dearest friend and only confidante, and though she was not many years the girl's senior, she had an influence over her that saved Nan from many a bad quarter of an hour.

Mrs. Dorrington was in her own room when Nan found her, sewing and singing softly to herself, the picture of happiness and content. Nan dropped on her knees beside her chair, and threw her arms impulsively around the little woman's neck.

"Tell me ever what it is, Nan, before you smothercate me," said Mrs. Dorrington, smoothing the girl's hair. The two had a language of their own, which the elder had learned from the younger.

"It is the most miserable misery, Johnny. Do you remember what I told you about those people?"

"How could I forget, Nan?"

"Well, those people are going head foremost into trouble, and whatever happens, I want to be there."

"Oh, is that so? Well, it is too bad," said the little woman sympathetically. "Perhaps if you would say something about it—not too much, but just enough for me to get it through my thick numskull——"

Whereupon Nan told of all the fears by which she was beset, and of all the troubles that racked her mind, and the two had quite a consultation.

"You are not afraid for yourself; why should you be afraid for those people?" inquired Mrs. Dorrington, laying great stress on "those people," the name that Gabriel went by when Nan and Johnny were referring to him.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Nan, helplessly. "It isn't because of what you would guess if you knew no better. I have a very great friendship for those people; but it isn't the other feeling—the kind that you were telling me about. If it is—oh, if it is—I shall never forgive myself."

"In time—yes. It is quite easy to forgive yourself on account of those people. I found it so."

"Oh, don't! You make me feel as if I ought never to speak to myself."

"Then don't," said Mrs. Dorrington, calmly. "You can speak to me instead of to that ignorant girl."

"Oh, you sweetest!" cried Nan, hugging her stepmother; "I am going to have you for my doll."

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Dorrington, shrugging her shoulders; "but you will have some trouble on your hands—yes, more than those people give you."

"Johnny, you are my little mother, and you never gave me any trouble in your life. I am the one that is troublesome; I am troubling you now."

"Silly thing! will you be good?" cried Mrs. Dorrington, tapping Nan lightly on the cheek. "How can you trouble me when I don't know what you mean? You haven't told me."

"I thought you could guess as well as I can," replied Nan.

"About some things—yes; but not about this terrible danger that is to overcome those people."

Whereupon, Nan told Mrs. Dorrington of the conversation she and Gabriel had overheard. To this information she added her suspicions that Gabriel intended to do something desperate; and then she gave a very vivid description of the strange white man, of his pale and eager countenance, his glittering, shifty eyes, and his thin, cruel lips.

Instead of shuddering, as she should have done, Mrs. Dorrington laughed. "But I don't see what the trouble is," she declared. "That boy is ever so large; he can take care of himself. But if you think not, then ask him to tea."

Nan frowned heavily. "But, Johnny, tea is so tame. Think of rescuing a friend from danger by means of a cup of tea! Doesn't it seem ridiculous?"

"Of course it is," responded Mrs. Dorrington. "But it isn't half so ridiculous as your make-believe. Oh, Nan! Nan! when will you come down from your clouds?"

Now, Nan's world of make-believe was as natural to her as the persons and things all about her. No sooner had she guessed that it was Gabriel's intention to find out what the Union League was for, and, in a way, expose himself to some possible danger of discovery, than she carried the whole matter into her land of make-believe as naturally as a mocking-bird carries a flake of thistle-down to its nest. Once there, nothing could be more reasonable or more logical than the terrible danger to which Gabriel would be exposed. While it lasted, Nan's feeling of anxiety and alarm was both real and sincere. Mrs. Absalom could never enter into this world of Nan's; she was too practical and downright. And yet she had a ready sympathy for the girl's troubles and humoured her without stint, though she sometimes declared that Nan was queer and flighty.

Mrs. Dorrington, on the other hand, inheriting the sensitive and artistic temperament of Flavian Dion, her father, was able to enter heartily into the most of Nan's vagaries. Sometimes she humoured them, but more frequently she laughed at them as the girl grew older. Occasionally, in her twilight conversations with her father, whose gentleness and shyness kept him in the background,

Mrs. Dorrington would deplore Nan's tendency to exploit her imagination.

"But she was born thus, my dear," Flavian Dion would reply, speaking the picturesque patois of New France. "It will either be her great misery, or her great happiness. How was it with me? Once it was my great misery, but now—you see how it is. Come! we will have some music, if Mademoiselle the Dreamer is willing."

And then they would go into the parlour, where, with Mrs. Dorrington at the piano, Flavian Dion with his violin, and Nan with her voice, which was rich and strong, they would render the beautiful folk-songs of France. Moreover, Flavian Dion had caught many of the plantation melodies, of which Nan knew the words, and when the French songs were exhausted, they would fall back on these. It frequently happened that Mademoiselle the Dreamer would add feet as well as voice to the negro melodies, especially if Tasma Tid were there to incite her, and the way that Nan reproduced steps and poses was both wonderful and inimitable.

The reader who takes the trouble to make inferences as he goes along, will perceive that Nan's solicitude for Gabriel was no compliment to him; it was not flattering to the heroism of a young man who was threatening to grow a moustache, for a young lady to believe, or even pretend to believe, that he needed to be rescued from some imaginary danger. Gabriel was strong enough to take a man's place at a log-rolling, and he would have had small relish for the information if he

had been told that Nan Dorrington was planning to rescue him.

Let the simple truth be told. Gabriel was no hero in Nan's eyes. He was merely a friend and former comrade, who now was in sad need of some one to take care of him. That was her belief, and she would have shrunk from the idea that Gabriel would one day be her lover. She had quite other views. Yes, indeed! Her lover must be a man who had passed through some desperate experiences. He must be a hero with sword and plume, a cutter and slasher, a man who had a relish for bloodshed, such as she had read about in the romances she had appropriated from her father's library.

Nan had brought over from her childhood many queer dreams and fancies. Once upon a time, she had heard her elders talking of John A. Murrell, the notorious land-pirate and highwayman. The man was one of the coarsest and cruellest of modern ruffians, but about his name the common people had placed a halo of romance. It was said of him that he rescued beautiful maidens from their abductors, and restored them to their friends, and that he robbed the rich only to give to the poor. Sad to say, this ruffian was Nan's ideal hero.

And now, when she was racking her brains to invent some bold and simple plan for the rescue of Gabriel, her mind reverted to this ideal hero of her childhood.

"If you insist, Johnny, I'll ask Gabriel to tea," Nan remarked for the second time; "but, as you say, it is perfectly ridiculous. Whoever heard of rescuing persons by inviting them to supper?" She paused a moment, and then went on with a sigh that would have

sounded very real in Mrs. Absalom's ears, but which simply brought a smile to Mrs. Dorrington's face—"Heigh-ho! What a pity John A. Murrell isn't alive to-day!"

"And who is this Mr. Murrell?" Mrs. Dorrington asked.

"He was a fierce robber-chief," replied Nan, placidly. "He wore a big black beard, and a hat with a red feather in it. Over his left shoulder was a red sash, and he rode a big white horse. He carried two big pistols and a bowie-knife—Nonny can tell you all about him."

Whereupon, Mrs. Dorrington jumped from her chair, and made an effort to catch the young romancer; and in a moment, the laughter of the pursuer, and the shrieks of the pursued, when she thought she was in danger of being caught, roused the echoes in the old house. Mrs. Absalom, who was in the kitchen, laughed and shook her head. "I believe them two scamps will be children when they are sixty year old!"

But after awhile, when their romp was over, Nan suddenly discovered that she had been in very high spirits, and this, according to the constitution and by-laws of the land of make-believe, was an unpardonable offence, especially when, as now, a very dear friend was in danger. So she went out upon the veranda, and half-way down the steps, where she seated herself in an attitude of extreme dejection.

While sitting there, Nan suddenly remembered that she did have a grievance and a very real one. Tasma Tid was in a state of insurrection. She had not been

permitted to accompany her young mistress when the latter visited her girl-friends, and for a long time she had been sulking and pouting. An effort had been made to induce Tasma Tid to make herself useful, but even the strong will of Mrs. Absalom collapsed when it found itself in conflict with the bright-eyed African.

Tasma Tid had been wounded in her tenderest part—her affections. Her sentiments and emotions, being primitive, were genuine. Her grief, when separated from Nan, was very keen. She refused to eat, and for the most part kept herself in seclusion, and no one was able to find her hiding-place. Now, when Nan threw herself upon the steps in an attitude of dejection, with her head on her arm, it happened that Tasma Tid was prowling about with the hope of catching a glimpse of her. The African, slipping around the house, suddenly came plump upon the object of her search. She stood still, and drew a long breath. Here was Honey Nan apparently in deep trouble. Tasma Tid crept up the steps as silently as a ghost, and sat beside the prostrate form. If Nan knew, she made no sign; nor did she move when the African laid a caressing hand on her hair. It was only when Tasma Tid leaned over and kissed Nan on the hand that she stirred. She raised her head, saying,

"You shouldn't do that, Tasma Tid; I'm too mean."

"How come you dis away, Honey Nan?" inquired the African in a low tone. "Who been-a hu't you?"

"No one," replied Nan; "I am just mean."

"'Tis ain't so, nohow. Somebody been-a hu't you. You show dem ter Tasma Tid—dee ain't hu't you no mo'."

"Where have you been? Why did you go away and leave me?"

"Nobody want we fer stay. You go off, an' den we go off. We go off an' walk, walk, walk in de graveyard —walk, walk, walk in de graveyard; an' den we go home way off yander in de woods."

"Home! why this is your home; it shall always be your home," cried Nan, touched by the forlorn look in Tasma Tid's eyes, and the despairing expression in her voice.

"No, no, Honey Nan; 'tis-a no home fer we when you drive we 'way fum foller you, when you shak-a yo' haid ef we come trot, trot 'hind you. We no want home lak dat. No, no, Honey Nan. We make home in de woods."

"Where is your home?" Nan inquired, full of curiosity.

"We take-a you dey when dem sun go 'way."

"Well, you must stay here," said Nan, emphatically. "You shall follow me wherever I go."

"You talk-a so dis time, Honey Nan; nex' time—" Tasma Tid ran down the steps, and went along the walk mimicking Nan's movements, shaking her frock first on one side and then on the other. Then she looked over her shoulder, turned around with a frown, stamped her foot and made menacing gestures with her hands. "Dat how 'twill be nex' time, Honey Nan."

Hearing Mrs. Absalom laughing, Nan conjectured that she had witnessed Tasma Tid's performance. Nonny," she cried, "do I really walk that way, and finger my skirt so?"

"To a t," said Mrs. Absalom, laughing louder. "Ef she was a foot an' a half higher, I'd 'a' made shore it was you practisin' ag'in the time when you'll mince by the store where old Silas Tomlin's yearlin' is clerkin', or by the tavern peazzer, where Frank Bethune an' the rest of the loafers set at. It's among the merikels that Gabe Tolliver don't mix wi' that crowd. I reckon maybe it's bekaze he jest natchally too wuthless."

"Now, Nonny! I don't think you ought to make fun of me," protested Nan. "I am perfectly certain that I don't mince when I walk, and you are always complaining that I don't care how my clothes look."

"Go roun' to the kitchen, you black slink," exclaimed Mrs. Absalom, addressing Tasma Tid, "an' git your dinner! You've traipsed and trolloped until I bet you can gulp down all the vittles on the place."

"And when you have finished your dinner, come to my room," said Nan.

It was not often that Nan was to be found in her own room during the day, but now she remembered that she had promised to spend the night with Eugenia Claiborne; and how was she to invite Gabriel to tea, as Mrs. Dorrington had suggested? There was but one thing to do, and that was to break her engagement with Eugenia. She was of half a dozen minds what to say to her friend. She wrote note after note, only to destroy

each one. She pulled her nose, stuck out her tongue, looked at the ceiling, and bit her thumb, but all to no purpose.

Tasma Tid, who had finished her dinner, sat on the floor eying Nan as an intelligent dog eyes its master, ready to respond to look, word or gesture. Finally, the African, seeing Nan's perplexity, made a suggestion.

"Make dem cuss-words come," she said. Tasma Tid had heard men use profane language when fretted or irritated, and she supposed that it was a remedy for troubles both small and large.

"Be jigged if I haven't a mind to," cried Nan, laughing at the African's earnestness.

But at last she flung her pen down, seized her hat, and, with an unspoken invitation to Tasma Tid, went out into the street, determined to go to the Gaither Place, where Eugenia lived, and present her excuses in person.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Mr. Sanders in His Cups

WHEN Nan came in sight of the court-house she saw a crowd of men and boys gazing at some spectacle on the side opposite her. Some were laughing, while others had serious faces. Among them she noticed Francis Bethune, and she also saw Gabriel, who was standing apart from the rest with a very gloomy countenance. Arriving near the crowd, she paused to discover what had excited their curiosity; and there before her eyes, seated on the court-house steps, was Mr. Billy Sanders, relating to an imaginary audience some choice incidents in his family history. His hat was off, and his face was very red.

As Nan listened, he was telling how his "pa" and "ma" had married in South Carolina, and had subsequently moved to Jasper County in Georgia. In coming away (according to Mr. Sanders's version), they had fetched a half dozen hogs too many, and maybe a cow or two that didn't belong to them. By-and-by the owners of the stock appeared in the neighbourhood where Mr. Sanders, Sr., had settled, found the missing property, and carried him away with them. They had, or claimed to have, a warrant, and they hustled the pioneer off to South Carolina, and put him in jail.

"Now, Sally Hart was Nancy's own gal," said Mr. Sanders, pausing to take a nip from a bottle he carried in his pocket. "She was a chip off'n the old block ef they ever was a block that had a chip. So Sally (that was ma) she went polin' off to Sou' Ca'liny. The night she got to whar she was agwine, she tore a hole in the side of the jail that you could 'a' driv a buggy through. Then she took poor pa by one ear, an' fetched him home. An' that ain't all. Arter she got him home, she took a rawhide an' liter'ly wore pa out. She said arterwards that she didn't larrup him for fetchin' the stock off, but for layin' up there in jail an' lettin' his crap spile. Well, that frailin' made a good Christian of pa. He j'ined the church, an' would 'a' been a preacher, but ma wouldn't let him. She allowed they'd be too much gaddin' about, an' maybe a little too much honeyin' up wi' the sisterin'. 'No,' says she, 'ef you want to do good prayin', pray whilst you're ploughin'. I'll look arter the hoein' myself,' says she."

Mr. Sanders was not regarded as a dangerous man in his cups, but on one well-remembered occasion he had fired into a crowd of men who were inclined to be too familiar, and since that day he had been given a wide berth when he took a seat on the court-house steps and began to recite his family history. While Nan stood there, Mr. Sanders drew a pistol from his pocket, and, smiling blandly, began to flourish it around. As he did so, Gabriel Tolliver sprang into the street and ran rapidly toward him. Some one in the crowd uttered a cry of warning. Seized by some blind impulse Nan ran after

Gabriel. Francis Bethune caught her arm as she ran by him, but she wrenched herself from his grasp, and ran faster than ever.

"Stand back there!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders in an angry voice, raising his pistol. For one brief moment, the spectators thought that Gabriel was doomed, for he went on without wavering. But he was really in no danger. Mr. Sanders had mistaken him for some of the young men who had been taunting him as they stood at a safe distance. But when he saw who it was, he replaced the pistol in his pocket, remarking, "You ought to hang out your sign, Gabe. Ef I hadn't 'a' had on my furseein' specks, I'm afear'd I'd a plugged you."

At that moment Nan arrived on the scene, her anger at white heat. She caught her breath, and then stood looking at Mr. Sanders, with eyes that fairly blazed with scorn and anger. "Ef looks'd burn, honey, they wouldn't be a cinder left of me," said Mr. Sanders, moving uneasily. "Arter she's through wi' me, Gabriel, plant me in a shady place, an' make old Tar-Baby thar," indicating Tasma Tid, who had followed Nan—"make old Tar-Baby thar set on my grave, an' warm it up once in awhile. I leave you my Sunday shirts wi' the frills on 'em, Gabriel, an' my Sunday boots wi' the red tops; an' have a piece put in the Malvern paper, statin' that I was one of the most populous and public-sperrited citizens of the county. An' tell how I went about killin' jimson weeds an' curkle-burrs for my neighbours by blowin' my breath on 'em."

What Nan had intended to say, she left unsaid. Her

feelings reacted while Mr. Sanders was talking, and she turned her back on him and began to cry. Under the circumstances, it was the very thing to do. Mr. Sanders's face fell. "I'll tell you the honest truth, Gabriel—I never know'd that anybody in the roun' world keer'd a continental whether I was drunk or sober, alive or dead; an' I'd lots ruther some un 'd stick a knife through my gizzard than to see that child cryin'."

He rose and went to Nan—he was not too tipsy to walk—and tried to lay his hand on her arm, but she whirled away from him. "Honey," he said, "what must I do? I'll do anything in the world you say."

"Go home and try to be decent," she answered.

"I will, honey, ef you an' Gabriel will go wi' me. I need some un for to keep the boogers off. You git on the lead side, honey, an' Gabriel, you be the off-hoss. Now, hitch on here"—he held out both elbows, so that each could take him by an arm—"an' when you're ready to start, give the word."

Nan dried her eyes as quickly as she could, but before she would consent to go with Mr. Sanders, insisted on searching him. She found a flask of apple-brandy, and hurled it against the side of the court-house.

"Nan," he said ruefully, "that's twice you've broke my heart in a quarter of an hour. Ain't there some way you can break Gabriel's?" He paused and sniffed the fumes of the apple-brandy. "It's a mighty good thing court ain't in session," he remarked, "bekaze the judge an' jury an' all the lawyers would come pourin' out for to smell at that wall there. You say they ain't no way

for you to break Gabriel's heart, too? " he asked again, turning to Nan.

" I just know my eyes are a sight," she said in reply. " Are they red and swollen, Gabriel? "

" They are somewhat red, but——"

" But what? " she asked, as Gabriel paused.

" They are just as pretty as ever."

" Mr. Sanders, that is the first compliment he ever paid me in his life."

" You'll remember it longer on that account," said Mr. Sanders. " Gabriel is lazy-minded, but he'll brighten up arter awhile. Speakin' of fust an' last, an' things of that kind," he went on, " I reckon this is the fust time I ever come betwixt you children. I hope no harm's done."

" Well, sir," said Nan, addressing Gabriel with a pretty formality, " since you are kind enough to pay me a compliment, I'll be bold enough to ask you to take tea with me this evening; and I'll have no refusal."

Gabriel found himself in an awkward predicament. He felt bound to discover what part the Union League was playing. He had read of its sinister influence in other parts of the South, and he judged that the hour of its organisation at Shady Dale was the aptest time for such a discovery. He couldn't tell Nan what his plans were—he had no idea that she had already guessed them—and he hardly knew what to say. He was thoroughly uncomfortable. He was silent so long that Mr. Sanders had an opportunity to ask Nan if she hadn't made a remark to Gabriel.

"Yes; I asked him to tea," she replied in a low voice; "he has forgotten it by this time." But Nan well knew why Gabriel was silent; she was neither vexed nor surprised at his hesitation. Nevertheless, she must play her part.

"Give him time, Nan; give him time," said Mr. Sanders, consolingly. "Gabriel comes of a stuttering family. They say it took his grandma e'en about seven year to tell Dick Lumsden she'd have him. I lay Gabriel is composin' in his mind a flowery piece sorter like, 'Here's my heart, an' here's my hand; ef you ax me to tea, I'm your'n to command.'"

"I'm sorry I can't come, Nan, but I can't; and it's just my luck that you should invite me to-day," said Gabriel, finally.

"You have another engagement?" asked Nan.

"No, not an engagement," he replied.

"Well, you are going to do something very unnecessary and improper," said Nan, with the air and tone of a mature woman. "You are sure to get into trouble. Why don't you ask your Mr. Bethune to take your place, or at least go with you?"

"Why, you talk as if you knew what I am going to do," remarked Gabriel; "but you couldn't guess in a week."

At this point Mr. Sanders tried to stop in order to deliver an address. "I bet you—I bet you a sevenpence ag'in a speckled hen that Nan knows precisely what you're up to."

But Nan and Gabriel pulled him along in spite of

his frequently expressed desire to "lay down in the road an' take a nap." "It's a shame," he said, "for a great big gal an' a great big boy to be harryin' a man as old as me. Why don't you ketch hands an' run to play? No, nothin' will do, but you must worry William H. Sanders, late of said county." He received no reply to this, and continued: "I'm glad I took too much, Gabriel, ef only for one thing. You know what I told you about Nan's temper—well, you've seed it for yourself. She's frailed Frank, she'd 'a' frailed me jest now ef you hadn't 'a' been on hand, an' she'll frail you out before long. She's jest turrible."

Mr. Sanders kept up his good-humour all the way home, and when he had been placed in charge of Uncle Plato, who knew how to deal with him, he said: "Now, fellers, I had a mighty good reason for restin' my mind. You cried bekase old Billy Sanders was drunk, didn't you, Nan? Well, I'm mighty glad you did. I never know'd before that a sob or two would make a Son of Temperance of a man; but that's what they'll do for me. Nobody in this world will ever see me drunk ag'in. So long!"

It may be said here that Mr. Sanders kept his promise. The events which followed required clear heads and steady hands for their shaping, but each crisis, as it arose, found Mr. Sanders, and a few others who acted with him, fully prepared to meet it, though there were times and occasions when he, as well as the rest, was overtaken by a profound sense of his helplessness. Some fell into melancholy, and some were overtaken by dejec-

tion, but Mr. Sanders never for a moment forgot to be cheerful.

"I don't suppose there is another girl in the country who would make such a spectacle of herself as I made to-day," said Nan, as she and Gabriel walked slowly in the direction of town.

"What do you mean?" inquired Gabriel.

"You know well enough," replied Nan. "Why, think of a young woman rushing across the public square in the face of a crowd, and doing as I did! I'll be the talk of the town. What is your opinion?"

"Well, considering who the man was, and everything, I think it was very becoming in you," replied Gabriel.

"Oh, thank you!" said Nan. "Under the circumstances, you could say no less. You have changed greatly, Gabriel, since Eugenia Claiborne began to make eyes at you. You seem to think it is a mark of politeness to pay compliments right and left, and to agree with everybody. No doubt, if an invitation to tea had come from further up the street, you would have found some excuse for accepting."

Nan's logic was quite feminine, but Gabriel took no advantage of that fact. "I'm sorry I can't come, Nan, and I hope you'll not be angry."

"Angry! why should I be angry?" Nan exclaimed. "An invitation to tea is not so important."

"But this one is important to me," said Gabriel. "It is the first time you have asked me, and I hope it won't be the last."

Nan said nothing more until she bade Gabriel good-bye at her father's gate. He thought she was angry, while she was wondering if he considered her bold.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Caught in a Corner

IT was no difficult matter for Nan Dorrington to infer what course of action Gabriel intended to pursue. The Union Leagues established in the South under the auspices of the political department of the Freedman's Bureau had already excited the suspicion of the whites. The reputation they instantly achieved was extremely sinister, and they had become the source of much uneasiness. There was an air of mystery about them which, however pleasing it might be to the negroes, was not at all relished by those who had been made the victims of radical legislation. There were wild rumours to the effect that the object of these leagues was to organise the negroes and prepare them for an armed attack on the whites.

These rumours were to be seen spread out in the newspapers, and were to be heard wherever people gathered together. Nan was familiar with them, and, while both she and Gabriel were possibly too young to harbour all the anxieties entertained by their elders, they nevertheless took a very keen interest in the situation; and it was not less keen because it had curiosity for its basis.

Gabriel had no sooner digested the purport of the

conversation to which he had listened than he made up his mind to unravel, if he could, the mystery of the Union League, and to discover what part the new-comer, the companion of the Rev. Jeremiah Tomlin, proposed to play. It was characteristic of the lad that he should act promptly. When he left Nan so unceremoniously, he ran to the Clopton Place to report what he had heard to Mr. Sanders, but he found that worthy citizen in no condition to give him aid, or even advice. Meriwether Clopton chanced to be in consultation with some gentleman from Atlanta, and could not be seen, while Francis Bethune was said to be in town somewhere.

It was then that Gabriel made up his mind that he would act alone. He knew the old school-house in which the league was to be organised, as well as he knew his own home. It had formerly been called the Shady Dale Male Academy, and its reputation, before the war, had gone far and wide. Gabriel had spent many a happy hour there, and some that were memorably unpleasant, especially during the term that a school-master by the name of McManus wielded the rod. Among the things that Gabriel remembered was the fact that the space under the stairway—the building had two stories—was boarded up so as to form a large closet, where the pupils deposited their extra coats and wraps, as well as their lunches. The closet had also been used as a reformatory for refractory pupils, and this was one reason why Gabriel remembered it so well; he had spent numerous uncomfortable hours there at a time when darkness and isolation had real terrors for him.

The building had been abandoned by the whites during the war, and was for a time used as a hospital. At the close of the war it was turned over to the negroes, who established there a flourishing school, which was presided over by a native Southerner, an old gentleman whom the war had stripped of this world's goods.

Gabriel thought it best to begin operations before the sun went down. He made a detour wide enough to place the school-house between him and Shady Dale, so that if by any chance his movements should attract attention he would have the appearance of approaching the building quite by accident. Under the circumstances, it was perhaps fortunate that he took this precaution, for when he drew near the school-house, the Rev. Jeremiah Tomlin was standing in the back door flourishing a broom.

"Hello, Jeremiah!" said Gabriel by way of salutation. "What's up now?"

"Good-evenin', Mister Gabe," responded the Rev. Jeremiah. "Dey been havin' some plasterin' done in my chu'ch, suh, an' we 'lowd we'd hol' pra'r-meetin' here ter-night. An' I'll tell you why, suh: You know mighty well how we coloured folks does—we ain't got nothin' fer ter hide, an' we couldn't hide it ef we did had sump'n. Well, suh, dem mongst us what got any erligion is bleeze ter show it; when de sperret move um, dey bleeze ter let one an'er know it; an' in dat way, suh, dey do a heap er movin' 'bout. Dey rastles wid Satan, ez you may say, when dey gits in a weavin' way; an' I wuz fear'd, suh, dat dey mought shake de damp plasterin' down."

"But you have no pulpit here," suggested Gabriel, who associated a pulpit with all religious gatherings.

"So much de better, suh," replied the Rev. Jeremiah. "Ef you wuz ter come ter my chu'ch, you'd allers see me come down when I gits warmed up. Dey ain't no pulpit big nuff for me long about dat time. No, suh; I'm bleeze ter have elbow-room, an' I'm mighty glad dey ain't no pulpit in here. But whar you been, Mr. Gabe?" inquired the Rev. Jeremiah, craftily changing the subject.

"Just walking about in the woods and fields," answered Gabriel.

"'Twant no use fer ter ax you, suh; you been doin' dat sence you wuz big nuff ter clime a fence. Ef you wan't wid Miss Nan, you wuz by yo'se'f. I uv seed you many a day, suh, when you didn't see me. You wuz wid Miss Nan dis ve'y day." The Rev. Jeremiah dropped his head to one side, and smiled a knowing smile. "Oh, you needn't be shame un it, suh," the negro went on as the colour slowly mounted to Gabriel's face. "I uv said it befo' an' I'll say it ag'in, an' I don't keer who hears me—Miss Nan is boun' ter make de finest 'oman in de lan'. An' dat ain't all, suh: when I hear folks hintin' dat she's gwine ter make a match wid Mr. Frank Bethune, sez I, 'Des keep yo' eye on Mr. Gabe'; dat zackly what I sez."

"Oh, the dickens and Tom Walker!" exclaimed Gabriel impatiently; "who's been talking of the affairs of Miss Dorrington in that way?"

"Why, purty nigh eve'ybody, suh," remarked the

Rev. Jeremiah, smacking his lips. "What white folks say in de parlour, you kin allers hear in de kitchen."

After firing this homely truth at Gabriel, the Rev. Jeremiah went to work with his broom and made a great pretence of sweeping and moving the benches about. The lad followed him in, and looked about him with interest. It was the first time he had revisited the old schoolhouse since he was a boy of ten, and he was pleased to find that there had been few changes. The desk at which he had sat was intact. His initials, rudely carved, stared him in the face, and there, too, was the hole he had cut in the seat. He remembered that this was a dungeon in which he had imprisoned many a fly. These mute evidences of his idleness seemed to be as solid as the hills. Between those times and the present, the wild and furious perspective of war lay spread out, and Gabriel could imagine that the idler who had hacked the desk belonged to another generation altogether.

He went to the blackboard, found a piece of chalk, and wrote in a large, bold hand: "Rev. Jeremiah Tomlin will lecture here to-night, beginning at early candlelight."

The Rev. Jeremiah, witnessing the performance, had his curiosity aroused: "What is de word you uv writ, suh?" he inquired, and when Gabriel had read it off, the negro exclaimed, "Well, suh! You put all dat down, an' it didn't take you no time; no, suh, not no time. But I might uv speckted it, bekase I hear lots er talk about how smart you is on all sides—dey all sesso."

"Does Tasma Tid belong to your church?" Gabriel inquired with a most innocent air.

"Do which, suh?" exclaimed Rev. Jeremiah, pausing with his broom suspended in the air. When Gabriel repeated his inquiry, the Rev. Jeremiah drew a deep breath, his nostrils dilated, and he seemed to grow several inches taller. "No, suh, she do not; no, suh, she do not belong ter my chu'ch. You kin look at her, suh, an' see de mark er de Ol' Boy on her. She got de hoodoo eye, suh; an' de blue gums dat go long wid it, an' ef she wuz ter jine my chu'ch, she'd be de only member."

It was very clear to Gabriel that nothing was to be gained by remaining, so he bade the Rev. Jeremiah goodbye, and went toward Shady Dale. When he was well out of sight, the negro approached the blackboard, and, with the most patient curiosity, examined the inscription or announcement that Gabriel had written. With his forefinger, he traced over the lines, as if in that way he might absorb the knowledge that was behind the writing. Then, stepping back a few paces, he viewed the writing critically. Finally he shook his head doubtfully, exclaiming aloud: "Dat's whar dey'll git us—yes, suh, dat's whar dey sho' will git us."

After which, he carefully closed the doors of the schoolhouse and followed the path leading to Shady Dale—the path that Gabriel had taken. The Rev. Jeremiah mumbled as he walked along, giving oral utterance to his thoughts, but in a tone too low to reveal their import. He had taken a step which it was now too late to retrace. He was not a vicious negro. In common with the great

majority of his race—in common, perhaps with the men of all races—he was eaten up by a desire to become prominent, to make himself conspicuous. Generations of civilisation (as it is called) have gone far to tone down this desire in the whites, and they manage to control it to some extent, though now and then we see it crop out in individuals. But there had been no toning down of the Rev. Jeremiah's egotism; on the contrary, it had been fed by the flattery of his congregation until it was gross and rank.

It was natural, therefore, under all the circumstances, that the Rev. Jeremiah should become the willing tool of the politicians and adventurers who had accepted the implied invitation of the radical leaders of the Republican Party to assist in the spoliation of the South. The Rev. Jeremiah, once he had been patted on the back, and addressed as Mr. Tomlin by a white man, and that man a representative of the Government, was quite ready to believe anything he was told by his new friends, and quite as ready to aid them in carrying out any scheme that their hatred of the South and their natural rapacity could suggest or invent.

Therefore, let it not be supposed that the Rev. Jeremiah, as he went along the path, mumbling out his thoughts, was expressing any doubt of the wisdom or expediency of the part he was expected to play in arraying the negroes against the whites. No; he was simply putting together as many sonorous phrases as he could remember, and storing them away in view of the contingency that he would be called on to address those

of his race who might be present at the organisation of the Union League. He had been very busy since his conference with the agent of the Freedman's Bureau, and, in one way and another, had managed to convey information of the proposed meeting to quite a number of the negroes; and in performing this service he was careful that a majority of those notified should be members of his church—negroes with whom his influence was all-powerful. But he had also invited Uncle Plato, Clopton's carriage-driver, Wiley Millirons, and Walthall's Jake, three of the worthiest and most sensible negroes to be found anywhere.

While the Rev. Jeremiah, full of his own importance, and swelling with childish vanity, was making his way toward Neighbour Tomlin's, on whose lot he had a house, rent free, there were other plotters at work. In addition to Gabriel Tolliver, Nan Dorrington was a plotter to be reckoned with, especially when she had as her copartner Tasma Tid, who was as cunning as some wild thing.

When the day was far spent, or, as Mrs. Absalom would say, "along to'rds the shank of the evenin'," Nan and Tasma Tid went wandering out of town in the direction of the school-house. The excuse Nan had given at home was that she wanted to see Tasma Tid's hiding-place. As they passed Tomlin's, they saw the Rev. Jeremiah splitting wood for his wife, who was the cook. At sight of Jeremiah, Tasma Tid began to laugh, and she laughed so long and so loud that the parson paused in his labours and looked at her. He took off his hat and bowed to Nan, whereupon Tasma Tid raised her

hand above her head, and indulged in a series of wild gesticulations, which, to the Rev. Jeremiah, were very mysterious and puzzling. He shook his head dubiously, and mopped his face with a large red handkerchief.

"What are you trying to do to Jeremiah?" inquired Nan, as they went along.

"Him fool nigger. We make him dream bad dream," responded Tasma Tid curtly.

The two were in no hurry. They sauntered along leisurely, and, although the sun had not set, by the time they had entered the woods in which the school-house stood, the deep shadows of the trees gave the effect of twilight to the scene. Tasma Tid led Nan to the old building, and told her to wait a moment. The African crawled under the house, and then suddenly reappeared at the back door, near which Nan stood waiting. Tasma Tid had crawled under the house, and lifted a loose plank in the floor of the closet, making her entrance in that way. The front door was locked and the key was safe in the pocket of the Rev. Jeremiah, but the back door was fastened on the inside, and Tasma Tid had no trouble in getting it open.

It is fair to say that Nan hesitated before entering. Some instinct or presentiment held her a moment. She was not afraid; her sense of fear had never developed itself; it was one of the attributes of human nature that was foreign to her experience; and this was why some of her actions, when she was younger, and likewise when she was older, were inexplicable to the rest of her sex, and made her the object of criticism which seemed to have

good ground to go upon. Nan hesitated with her foot on the step, but it was not her way to draw back, and she went in. Tasma Tid refastened the door very carefully, and then turned and led the way toward the closet. The room was not wholly dark; one or two of the shutters had fallen off, and in this way a little light filtered in. Nan followed Tasma Tid to the closet, the door of which was open.

"Dis-a we house," said Tasma Tid; "dis-a de place wey we live at."

"Why did you come here?" Nan asked.

"We had no nurrer place; all-a we frien' gone; da's why."

What further comment Nan may have made cannot even be guessed, for at that moment there was a noise at one of the windows; some one was trying to raise the sash. Nan and Tasma Tid held their breath while they listened, and then, when they were sure that some one was preparing to enter the building, the African closed the closet door noiselessly, and pulled Nan after her to the narrowest and most uncomfortable part of the musty and dusty place—the space next the stairway, where it was so low that they were compelled to sit flat on the floor.

The intruder, whoever he might be, crawled cautiously through the window—they could hear the buttons of his coat strike against the sill—and leaped lightly to the floor. He lowered the window again, and then, after tiptoeing about among the benches, came straight to the closet. As Tasma Tid had not taken time to fasten it on the inside, the door was easily opened. Dark as it was,

Nan and the African could see that the intruder was a man, but, beyond this, they could distinguish nothing. Nan and her companion would have breathed freer if recognition had been possible, for the new-comer was Gabriel, who had determined to take this method of discovering the aim and object of the Union League.

Once in the closet, Gabriel took pains to make the inside fastenings secure. It was one of the whims of Mr. McManus, the school-master, who had so often caused Gabriel's head and the blackboard to meet, that the fastenings of this closet should be upon the inside. It tickled his humour to feel that a refractory boy should be his own jailer, able, and yet not daring, to release himself until the master should rap sharply on the door.

Gabriel was less familiar with these fastenings than he had formerly been, and he fumbled about in the dark for some moments before he could adjust them to his satisfaction. He made no effort to explore the closet, taking for granted that it could have no other occupant. This was fortunate for Nan, for if he had moved about to any extent, he would inevitably have stumbled over the African and her young mistress, who were crouched and huddled as far under the stairway as they could get.

Gabriel stood still a moment, as if listening, and then he sat flat on the floor, and stretched out his legs with a sigh of relief. After that there was a long period of silence, during which Nan had a fine opportunity to be very sorry that she had ever ventured out on such a fool's errand. "If I get out of this scrape," she thought over and over again, "I'll never be a tomboy; I'll never

be a harum-scarum girl any more." She had no physical fear, but she realised that she was placed in a very awkward position.

She was devoured with curiosity to know whether the intruder really was Gabriel. She hoped it was, and the hope caused her to blush in the dark. She knew she was blushing; she felt her ears burn—for what would Gabriel think if he knew that she was crouching on the floor, not more than an arm's length from him? Why, naturally, he would have no respect for her. How could he? she asked herself.

As for Gabriel, he was sublimely unconscious of the fact that he was not alone. Once or twice he fancied he heard some one breathing, but he was a lad who was very close to nature, and he knew how many strange and varied sounds rise mysteriously out of the most profound silence; and so, instead of becoming suspicious, he became drowsy. He made himself as comfortable as he could, and leaned against the wall, pitting his patience against the loneliness of the place and the slow passage of time.

Being a healthy lad, Gabriel would have gone to sleep then and there, but for a mysterious splutter and explosion, so to speak, which went off right at his elbow, as he supposed. He was in that neutral territory between sleeping and waking and he was unable to recognise the sound that had startled him; and it would have remained a mystery but for the fact that a sneeze is usually accompanied by its twin. Nan had for some time felt an inclination to sneeze, and the more she tried

to resist it the greater the inclination grew, until finally, it culminated in the spluttering explosion that had aroused Gabriel. This was followed by a sneeze which he had no difficulty in recognising.

The fact that some unknown person was a joint occupant of the closet upset him so little that he was surprised at himself. He remained perfectly quiet for awhile, endeavouring to map out a course of action, little knowing that Nan Dorrington was chewing her nails with anger a few feet from where he sat.

"Who are you?" he asked finally. He spoke in a firm low tone.

In another moment Nan's impulsiveness would have betrayed her, but Tasma Tid came to her rescue.

"Huccum you in we house? Whaffer you come dey? How you call you' name?"

"Oh, shucks! Is that you, Tiddy Me Tas?"—this was the way Gabriel sometimes twisted her name. "I thought you were the booger-man. You'd better run along home to your Miss Nan. She says she wants to see you. What are you hiding out here for anyway?"

"We no hide, Misser Gable. 'Tis-a we house, dis. Honey Nan no want we; she no want nobody. She talkin' by dat Misser Frank what live-a down dey at Clopton. Dee got cake, dee got wine, dee got all de bittle dee want."

Tasma Tid told this whopper in spite of the fact that Nan was giving her warning nudges and pinches.

"Yes, I reckon they are having a good time," said

Gabriel gloomily. "Miss Nan gave me an invitation, but I couldn't go." It was something new in Nan's experience to hear Gabriel call her Miss Nan, and she rather relished the sensation it gave her. She was now ready to believe that she was really and truly a young lady.

"Whaffer you ain't gone down dey?" inquired Tasma Tid. "Ef you kin come dis-a way, you kin go down dey."

"I was obliged to come here," responded Gabriel.

"Shoo! dem fib roll out lak dey been had grease on top um," exclaimed Tasma Tid derisively. "Who been ax you fer come by dis way? 'Tis-a we house, dis. You better go, Misser Gable; go by dat place wey Honey Nan live, an' look in de blin' wey you see dat Misser Frank, and dat Misser Paul Tomlin, an' watch um how dee kin make love. Maybe you kin fin' out how fer make love you'se'f."

Gabriel laughed uneasily. "No, Tiddy Me Tas—no love-making for me. I'm either too old or too young, I forget which."

They ceased talking, for they heard footsteps outside, and the sound of voices. Presently some one opened the door, and it seemed from the noise that was made, the shuffling of feet, and the repressed tones of conversation, that a considerable number of negroes had responded to the Rev. Jeremiah's invitation.

The first-comers evidently lit a candle, for a phantom-like shadow of light trickled through a small crack in the closet door, and a faint, but unmistakable, odour of a sulphur match reached Gabriel's nostrils. There were

whispered consultations, and a good deal of muffled and subdued conversation, but every word that was distinctly enunciated was clearly heard in the sound-box of a closet. But suddenly all conversation ceased, and complete silence took possession of those present.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Union League Organises

THE silence was presently broken by a very clear and distinct voice, which both Nan and Gabriel recognised as that of the stranger whom they had overheard talking to the Rev. Jeremiah.

"Before we proceed to the business that has called us together," said the voice, "it is best that we should come to some clear understanding. I am not here in my own behalf. I have nothing to lose except my life, and nothing to gain but the betterment of those who have been released from the horrors of slavery. Very few of you know even my name, but the very fact that I am here with you to-night should go far to reassure you. It is sufficient to say that I represent the great party that has given you your freedom. That fact constitutes my credentials."

"Bless God!" exclaimed the Rev. Jeremiah, piously. He rolled the word "credentials" under his tongue, and resolved to remember it and bring it out in one of his sermons. The stranger had a very smooth and pleasing delivery. There was a sort of Sunday-school cadence to his voice well calculated to impress his audience. The language he employed was far above the heads of those

to whom he spoke, but his persuasive tone, and his engaging manner carried conviction. The great majority of the negroes present were ready to believe what he said whether they understood it or not.

" My name," he went on, " is Gilbert Hotchkiss, and I belong to a family that has been striving for more than a generation to bring about the emancipation of the negroes. My father worked until the day of his death for the abolition of slavery; and now that slavery has been abolished, I, with thousands of devoted women and men whom you have never seen and doubtless never will see, have begun the work of uplifting the coloured people in order that they may be placed in a position to appreciate the benefits that have been conferred on them, and enable them to enjoy the fruits of freedom. It is a great work, a grand work, and all we ask is the active co-operation and assistance of the coloured people themselves."

These were the words of Mr. Hotchkiss, the philanthropist; but now Mr. Hotchkiss, the politician, took his place, and there was an indefinable change in the tone of his voice.

" There is no need to ask," he said, " why we do not, in this great work of uplifting the coloured race, ask the assistance of those who were lately in rebellion against the best and the greatest Government on which the sun ever shone. It would be foolish and unreasonable to expect their assistance. They fought to destroy the Union, and they were defeated; they fought to perpetuate slavery, and they failed. More than that, there is every

reason to believe that they will refuse to abide by the results of the war. They are very quiet now, but they are merely waiting their opportunity. With our troops withdrawn, and with the Republican Party weakened by opposition, what is to prevent your late masters from placing you back in slavery? Could we expect anything less from those who have been brought up to believe that slavery is a divine institution?"

"You hear dat, people?" cried the Rev. Jeremiah.

"You cannot help believing," continued Mr. Hotchkiss, "that your former masters would force the chains of slavery on you if they could; all they lack is the opportunity; and if you are not careful, they will find an opportunity, or make one. Slavery was profitable to them once, and it would be profitable again. There is one fact you should never forget," said the speaker, warming up a little. "It is a most stupendous fact, namely: that every dollar's worth of property in all this Southern land has been earned by the labour of your hands and by the sweat of your brows. It has been earned by you, not once, but many times over. You have earned every dollar that has ever circulated here. The lands, the houses, the stock, and all the farm improvements are a part of the fruits of negro labour; and when right and justice prevail, this property, or a very large part of it, will be yours."

This statement was received with demonstrations of approval, one of the audience exclaiming: "You sho' is talkin' now, boss!"

"But how are right and justice to prevail? Only by

the constant and continued success of the party of which the martyred Lincoln was the leader. The mission of that party has not yet been fulfilled. First, it made you freemen. Then it went a step further, and made you citizens and voters. Should you sustain it by your votes, it will take still another step, and give you an opportunity to reap some of the fruits of your toil, as well as the toil of the unfortunates who pined away and died or who were starved under the infamous system of slavery."

"Ain't it de trufe!" exclaimed the Rev. Jeremiah fervently.

"We have met here to-night to organise a Union League," continued Mr. Hotchkiss. "The object of this league is to bring about a unity of purpose and action among its members, to give them opportunities to confer together, and to secure a clear understanding. No one knows what will happen. Your former masters are jealous of your rights; they will try by every means in their power to take these rights away from you. They will employ both force and fraud, and the only way for you to meet and overcome this danger is to organise. Ten men who understand one another and act together are more powerful than a hundred who act as individuals. You must be as wise as serpents, but not as harmless as doves. Your rights have been bought for you by the blood of thousands of martyrs, and you must defend them. If necessary arm yourselves. Yea! if necessary apply the torch."

There was a certain air of plausibility about this

harangue, a degree of earnestness, that impressed Gabriel, and he does not know to this day whether this ill-informed emissary of race hatred and sectional prejudice really believed all that he said. Who shall judge? Certainly not those who remember the temper of those times, the revengeful attitude of the radical leaders at the North, and the distorted fears of those who suddenly found themselves surrounded by a horde of ignorant voters, pliant tools in the hands of unscrupulous carpet-baggers.

Hotchkiss brought his remarks to a close, and then proceeded to read the constitution and by-laws of the proposed Union League, under which, he explained, hundreds of leagues had been organised. Each one who desired to become a member was to make oath separately and individually that he would not betray the secrets of the league, nor disclose the signs and pass-words, nor tolerate any opposition to the Republican Party, nor have any unnecessary dealings with rebels and former slave-holders. He was to keep eyes and ears open, and report all important developments to the league.

"We are now ready, I presume, for the ceremonies to begin," remarked Mr. Hotchkiss. "First we will elect officers of the league, and I suggest that the Honourable Jeremiah Tomlin be made President."

"Dat's right!" "He sho is de man!" "No needs fer ter put dat ter de question!" were some of the indorsements that came from various parts of the room.

The Rev. Jeremiah was immensely tickled by the title of Honourable that had been so unexpectedly bestowed

on him. He hung his head with as much modesty as he could summon, and, bearing in mind his calling, one might have been pardoned for suspecting that he was offering up a brief prayer of thanksgiving. He rose in his place, however, passed the back of his hand across his mouth, paused a moment, and then began:

"Mr. Cheer, I thank you an' deze friends might'ly fer de renomination er my name, an' de gener'l endossments er de balance er deze gentermen. So fur, so good. But, Mr. Cheer, 'fo' we gits right spang down ter business, I moves dat some er de br'ers be ax'd fer ter give der idee er dis plan which have been laid befo' us by our hon'bul frien'. I moves dot we hear fum Br'er Plato Clopton, ef so be de sperret is on him fer ter gi' us his sesso."

Uncle Plato, taken somewhat by surprise, was slow in responding, but when he rose, he presented a striking figure. He was taller than the average negro, and there was a simple dignity—an air of gentility and serene affability—in his attitude and bearing that attracted the attention of Mr. Hotchkiss. The Rev. Jeremiah was still standing, and Uncle Plato, after bowing gracefully to Mr. Hotchkiss, turned with a smile to the negro who had called on him.

"You know mighty well, Br'er Jerry, dat I ain't seeh a talker ez ter git up an' say my say des dry so, an' let it go at dat. Howsomever, I laid off ter say sump'n, an' I ain't sorry you called my name. In what's been said dey's a heap dat I 'gree wid. I b'lieve dat de cullud folks oughter work tergedder, an' stan tergedder fer ter he'p

an' be holped. But when you call on me fer ter turn my back on my marster, an' go to hatin' 'im, you'll hatter skuzen me. You sho will."

"He ain't yo' marster now, Br'er Plato, an' you know it," said the Rev. Jeremiah.

"I know dat mighty well," replied Uncle Plato, "but ef it don't hurt my feelin's fer ter call him dat it oughtn't ter pester yuther people. How it may be wid you all, I dunno; but me an' my marster wus boys tergedder. We useter play wid one an'er, an' fall out an' fight, an' I've whipped him des ez many times ez he ever whipped me—an' he'll tell you de same."

"But all this," suggested Mr. Hotchkiss coldly, "has nothing to do with the matter in hand. The coloured race is facing conditions that amount to a crisis—a crisis that has no parallel in the world's history."

"Dat is suttinly so!" the Rev. Jeremiah ejaculated, though he had but a dim notion of what Hotchkiss was talking about.

"They have been made citizens," pursued the organiser, "and it is their duty to demand all their rights and to be satisfied with nothing less. The best men of our party believe that the rebels are still rebellious, and that they will seize the first opportunity to re-enslave the coloured people."

"Ah-yi!" exclaimed the Rev. Jeremiah triumphantly.

"Does you reely b'lieve, Br'er Jerry, dat Pulaski Tomlin will ever try ter put you back in slav'ry?" asked Uncle Plato.

The inquiry was a poser, and the Rev. Jeremiah was

unable to make any satisfactory reply. Perceiving this, Mr. Hotchkiss came to the rescue. "You must bear in mind," he blandly remarked, "that this is not a question of one person here and another person there. It concerns a whole race. Should all the former slave-owners of the South succeed in reclaiming their slaves, Mr. Tomlin and Mr. Clopton would be compelled by public sentiment to reclaim theirs. If they refused to do so, their former slaves would fall into the hands of new masters. It is not a question of individuals at all."

"Well, suh, we'll fin' out atter awhile dat we'll hatter do like de white folks. Eve'y tub'll hatter stan' on its own bottom. I'm des ez free now ez I wuz twenty year ago——"

"I can well believe that, after what you have said," Mr. Hotchkiss interrupted.

The tone of his voice was as smooth as velvet, but his words carried the sting of an imputation, and Uncle Plato felt it and resented it. "Yes, suh,—an' I wuz des ez free twenty year ago ez you all will ever be. My marster has been good ter me fum de work go. I ain't stayin' wid 'im bekaze he got money. Ef him an' Miss Sa'ah di'n'a have a dollar in de worl', an no way ter git it, I'd work my arms off fer 'm. An' ef I 'fused ter do it, my wife 'd quit me, an' my chillun wouldn't look at me. But I'll tell you what I'll do: when my marster tu'ns his back on me I'll tu'n my back on him."

"I'm really sorry that you persist in making this question a personal one when it affects all the negroes now living and millions yet to be born," said Mr. Hotchkiss.

"Well, suh, le's look at it dat away," Uncle Plato insisted. "Spoz'n you ban' tergedder like dis, an' try ter tu'n de white folks ag'in you, an' dey see what you up ter, an' tu'n der backs, den what you gwine ter do? You got ter live here an' you got ter make yo' livin' here. Is you gwine ter cripple de cow dat gives de cream?"

Uncle Plato paused and looked around. He saw at once that he was in a hopeless minority, and so he reached for his hat. "I'm mighty glad ter know you, suh," he said to Mr. Hotchkiss, with a bow that Chesterfield might have envied, "but I'll hatter bid you good-night." With that, he went out, followed by Wiley Millirons and Walthall's Jake, much to the relief of the Rev. Jeremiah, who proceeded to denounce "white folks' niggers," and to utter some very violent threats.

Then, in no long time, the Union League was organised. Those in the closet failed to hear the words that constituted the ceremony of initiation. Only low mutterings came to their ears. But the ceremony consisted of a lot of mummery well calculated to impress the simple-minded negroes. After a time the meeting adjourned, the solitary candle was blown out, and the last negro departed.

Gabriel waited until all sounds had died away, and then, with a brief good-night to Tasma Tid, he opened the closet door, slipped out, and was soon on his way home. But before he was out of the dark grove, some one went flitting by him—in fact, he thought he saw two figures dimly outlined in the darkness; yet he was

not sure—and presently he thought he heard a mocking laugh, which sounded very much as if it had issued from the lips of Nan Dorrington. But he was not sure that he heard the laugh, and how, he asked himself, could he imagine that it was Nan Dorrington's even if he had heard it? He told himself confidentially, the news to go no further, that he was a drivelling idiot.

As Gabriel went along he soon forgot his momentary impressions as to the two figures in the dark and the laugh that had seemed to come floating back to him. The suave and well-modulated voice of Mr. Hotchkiss rang in his ears. He had but one fault to find with the delivery: Mr. Hotchkiss dwelt on his r's until they were as long as a fishing-pole, and as sharp as a shoemaker's awl. Though these magnified r's made Gabriel's flesh crawl, he had been very much impressed by the address, only part of which has been reported here. Boylike, he never paused to consider the motives or the ulterior purpose of the speaker. Gabriel knew of course that there was no intention on the part of the whites to reenslave the negroes; he knew that there was not even a desire to do so. He knew, too, that there were many incendiary hints in the address—hints that were illuminated and emphasised more by the inflections of the speaker's voice than by the words in which they were conveyed. In spite of the fact that he resented these hints as keenly as possible, he could see the plausibility of the speaker's argument in so far as it appealed to the childish fears and doubts and uneasiness of the negroes. If anything could be depended on, he thought, to pro-

mote a spirit of incendiarism among the negroes such an address would be that thing.

If Gabriel had attended some of the later meetings of the league, he would have discovered that the address he had heard was a milk-and-water affair, compared with some of the harangues that were made to the negroes in the old school-house.

All that Gabriel had heard was duly reported to Meriwether Clopton, and to Mr. Sanders, and in a very short time all the whites in the community became aware of the fact that the negroes were taking lessons in race-hatred and incendiarism, and as a natural result, Hotchkiss became a marked man. His comings and goings were all noted, so much so that he soon found it convenient as well as comfortable to make his head-quarters in the country, at the home of Judge Mahlon Butts, whose Union principles had carried him into the Republican Party. The Judge lived a mile and a half from the corporation line, and Mr. Hotchkiss's explanation for moving there was that the exercise to be found in walking back and forth was necessary to his health.

Uncle Plato was very much surprised the next day to be called into the house where Mr. Sanders was sitting with Meriwether Clopton and Miss Sarah in order that they might shake hands with him.

"I want to shake your hand, Plato," said his old master. "I've always thought a great deal of you, but I think more of you to-day than ever before."

"And you must shake hands with me, Plato," remarked Sarah Clopton.

"Well, sence shakin' han's is comin' more into fashion these days, I reckon you'll have to shake wi' me," declared Mr. Sanders.

"I declar' ter gracious I dunner whedder you all is makin' fun er me or not!" exclaimed Uncle Plato. "But sump'n sholy must 'a' happened, kaze des now when I wuz downtown Mr. Alford call me in his sto' an' 'low, 'Plato, when you wanter buy anything, des come right in, money er no money, kaze yo' credit des ez good in here ez de best man in town.' I dunner what done come over eve'ybody." He went away laughing.

Nevertheless, Uncle Plato was more seriously affected by the schemes of Mr. Hotchkiss than any other inhabitant of Shady Dale. He had been a leader in the Rev. Jeremiah's church, and up to the day of the organisation of the Union League, had wielded an influence among the negroes second only to that of the Rev. Jeremiah himself. But now all was changed. He soon found that he would have to resign his deaconship, for those whom he had regarded as his spiritual brethren were now his enemies—at any rate they were no longer his friends.

But Uncle Plato had one consolation in his troubles, and that was the strong indorsement and support of Aunt Charity, his wife, who was the cook at Clopton's, famous from one end of the State to the other for her biscuits and waffles. Uncle Plato had been somewhat dubious about her attitude, for the negro women had developed the most intense partisanship, and some of them were loud in their threats, going much further than the men. No doubt Aunt Charity would have taken a differ-

ent course had she been in her husband's place, if only for the sake of her colour, as she called her race. She was very fond of her own white folks, but she had her prejudices against the rest.

When Uncle Plato reached home and told his wife what he had said and done, she drew a long breath and looked at him hard for some time. Then she took up her pipe from the chimney-corner, remarking, "Well, what you done, you done; dar's yo' supper."

Uncle Plato had a remarkably good appetite, and while he ate, Aunt Charity sat near a window and looked out at the stars. She was getting together in her mind a supply of personal reminiscences, of which she had a goodly store. Presently, she began to shake with laughter, which she tried to suppress. Uncle Plato mistook the sound he heard for an evidence of grief, and he spoke up promptly:

"I declar' ef I'd 'a' know'd I wuz gwine ter hurt yo' feelings, I'd 'a' j'ined in wid um den an' dar. An' 'taint too late yit. I kin go ter Br'er Jerry an' tell him whilst I ain't change my own min' I'll j'ine in wid um druther dan be offish an' mule-headed."

"No you won't! no you won't! no you won't!" exclaimed Aunt Charity. "I mought 'a' done diffunt, an' I mought 'a' done wrong. We'll hatter git out'n de church, ef you kin call it a church, but dat ain't so mighty hard ter do. Yit, 'fo' we does git out I'm gwine ter preach ol' Jerry's funer'l one time—des one time. Dat what make me laugh des now; I was runnin' over in my min' how I kin raise his hide. Some folks got de

idee dat kaze I'm fat I'm bleeze ter be long-sufferin'; but you know better'n dat, don't you?"

"Well, I know dis," said Uncle Plato, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, "when you git yo' dander up you kin talk loud an' long."

"Miss Sa'ah done tol' me dat when I git mad, I kin keep up a conversation ez long ez de nex' one," remarked Aunt Charity, with real pride. "An' den dar's dat hat Miss Sa'ah gi' me; I laid off ter w'ar it ter church nex' Sunday, but now—well, I speck I better des w'ar my head-hankcher, kaze dey's sho gwine ter be trouble ef any un um look at me cross-eyed."

"You gwine, is you?" Uncle Plato asked.

"Ef I live," replied Aunt Charity, "I'm des ez good ez dar right now. An' mo' dan dat, you'll go too. 'Tain't gwineter be said dat de Clopton niggers hung der heads bekaze dey stood by der own white folks. Ef it's said, it'll hatter be said 'bout some er de yuthers."

"I'll go," said Uncle Plato, "but I hope I won't hatter frail Br'er Jerry out."

"Now, dat's right whar we gits crossways," Aunt Charity declared. "I hope you'll hatter frail 'im out."

Fortunately, Uncle Plato had no excuse for using his walking-cane on the Rev. Jeremiah, when Sunday came. None of the church-members made any active show of animosity. They simply held themselves aloof. Aunt Charity had her innings, however. When services were over, and the congregation was slowly filing out of the building, followed by the Rev. Jeremiah, she remarked loud enough for all to hear her:

"Br'er Jerry, de nex' time you want me ter cook pullets fer dat ar Lizzie Gaither, des fetch um 'long. I'll be glad ter 'blige you."

As the Rev. Jeremiah's wife was close at hand, the closing scenes can be better imagined than described. In this chronicle the veil of silence must be thrown over them.

It may be said, nevertheless, that Uncle Plato and his wife felt very keenly the awkward position in which they were placed by the increasing prejudice of the rest of the negroes. They were both sociable in their natures, but now they were practically cut off from all association with those who had been their very good friends. It was a real sacrifice they had to make. On the other hand, who shall say that their firmness in this matter was not the means of preventing, at least in Shady Dale, many of the misfortunes that fell to the lot of the negroes elsewhere? There can hardly be a doubt that their attitude, firm and yet modest, had a restraining influence on some of the more reckless negroes, who, under the earnest but dangerous teachings of Hotchkiss and his fellow-workers, would otherwise have been led into excesses which would have called for bloody reprisals.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Nan and Her Young Lady Friends

NAN DORRINGTON found a pretty howdy-do at her house when she reached home the night the Union League was organised. The members of the household were all panic-stricken when the hours passed and Nan failed to return. Ordinarily, there would have been no alarm whatever, but a little after dark, Eugenia Claiborne, accompanied by a little negro girl, came to Dorrington's to find out why Nan had failed to keep her engagement. She had promised to take supper with Eugenia, and to spend the night.

It will be remembered that Nan was on her way to present her excuses to Eugenia when the spectacle of Mr. Sanders, tipsy and talkative, had attracted her attention. She thought no more of her engagement, and for the time being Eugenia was to Nan as if she had never existed. Meanwhile, the members of the Dorrington household, if they thought of Nan at all, concluded that she had gone to the Gaither Place, where Eugenia lived. But when Miss Claiborne came seeking her, why that put another face on affairs. Eugenia decided to wait for her; but when the long minutes, and the half hours and the hours passed, and Nan failed to make her appear-

ance, Mrs. Absalom began to grow nervous, and Mrs. Dorrington went from room to room with a very long face. She could have made a very shrewd guess as to Nan's whereabouts, but she didn't dare to admit, even to herself, that the girl had been so indiscreet as to go in person to the rescue of Gabriel.

They waited and waited, until at last Mrs. Dorrington suggested that something should be done. "I don't know what," she said, "but something; that would be better than sitting here waiting."

Mrs. Absalom insisted on keeping up an air of bravado. "The child's safe wherever she is. She's been a rippittin' 'round all day tryin' to git old Billy Sanders sober, an' more'n likely she's sot down some'rs an' fell asleep. Ef folks could sleep off the'r sins, Nan'd be a saint."

"But wherever she is, she isn't here," remarked Mrs. Dorrington, tearfully; "and here is where she should be. I wonder what her father will say when he comes?" Dr. Dorrington had gone to visit a patient in the country.

"Perhaps she went with him," Eugenia suggested.

"No fear of that," said Mrs. Absalom. "Ridin' in a gig is too much like work for Nan to be fond of it. No; she's some'rs she's got no business, an' ef I could lay my hand on her, I'd jerk her home so quick, her head would swim worse than old Billy Sanders's does when he's full up to the chin."

After awhile, Eugenia said she had waited long enough, but Mrs. Dorrington looked at her with such

imploring eyes that she hesitated. "If you go," said the lady, "I will feel that Nan is not coming, but as long as you stay, I have hope that she will run in any moment. She is with that Tasma Tid, and I think it is terrible that we can't get rid of that negro. I have never been able to like negroes."

"Well, you needn't be too hard on the niggers," declared Mrs. Absalom. "Everything they know, everything they do, everything they say—everything—they have larnt from the white folks. Study a nigger right close, an' you'll ketch a glimpse of how white folks would look an' do wi'out the'r trimmin's."

"Oh, perhaps so," assented Mrs. Dorrington, with a little shrug of the shoulders which said a good deal plainer than words, "You couldn't make me believe that."

Just as Dr. Dorrington drove up, and just as Mrs. Absalom was about to get her bonnet, for the purpose, as she said, of "scouring the town," Nan came running in out of breath. "Oh, such a time as I've had!" she exclaimed. "You'll not be angry with me, Eugenia, when you hear all! Talk of adventures! Well, I have had one at last, after waiting all these years! Don't scold me, Nonny, until you know where I've been and what I've done. And poor Johnny has been crying, and having all sorts of wild thoughts about poor me. Don't go, Eugenia; I am going with you in a moment—just as soon as I can gather my wits about me. I am perfectly wild."

"Tell us something new," said Mrs. Absalom drily. "Here we've been on pins and needles, thinkin' maybe

some of your John A. Murrells had rushed into town an' kidnapped you, an' all the time you an' that slink of a nigger have been gallivantin' over the face of the yeth. I declare ef Randolph don't do somethin' wi' you they ain't no tellin' what'll become of you."

But Dr. Dorrington was not in the humour for scolding; he rarely ever was; but on that particular night less so than ever. For one brief moment, Nan thought he was too angry to scold, and this she dreaded worse than any outbreak; for when he was silent over some of her capers she took it for granted that his feelings were hurt, and this thought was sufficient to give her more misery than anything else. But she soon discovered that his gravity, which was unusual, had its origin elsewhere. She saw him take a tiny tin waggon, all painted red, from his pocket and place it on the mantel-piece, and both she and Mrs. Dorrington went to him.

"Oh, popsy! I'm so sorry about everything! He didn't need it, did he?"

"No, the little fellow has no more use for toys. He sent you his love, Nan. He was talking about you with his last breath; he remembered everything you said and did when you went with me to see him. He said you must be good."

Now, if Nan was a heroine, or anything like one, it would never do to say that she hid her face in her hands and wept a little when she heard of the death of the little boy who had been her father's patient for many months. In the present state of literary criticism, one must be very careful not to permit women and children

to display their sensitive and tender natures. Only the other day, a very good book was damned because one of the female characters had wept 393 times during the course of the story. Out upon tears and human nature! Let us go out and reform some one, and leave tears to the kindergarten, where steps are taking even now to dry up the fountains of youth.

Nevertheless, Nan cried a little, and so did Eugenia Claiborne, when she heard the story of the little boy who had suffered so long and so patiently. The news of his death tended to quiet Nan's excitement, but she told her story, and, though the child's death took the edge off Nan's excitement, the story of her adventure attracted as much attention as she thought it would. She said nothing about Gabriel, and it was supposed that only she and Tasma Tid were in the closet; but the next morning, when Dr. Dorrington drove over to Clopton's to carry the information, he was met by the statement that Gabriel had told of it the night before. A little inquiry developed the fact that Gabriel had concealed himself in the closet in order to discover the mysteries of the Union League.

Dorrington decided that the matter was either very serious or very amusing, and he took occasion to question Nan about it. "You didn't tell us that Gabriel was in the closet with you," he said to Nan.

"Well, popsy, so far as I was concerned he was not there. He certainly has no idea that I was there, and if he ever finds it out, I'll never speak to him again. He never will find it out unless he is told by some one who

dislikes me. Outside of this family," Nan went on with dignity, "not a soul knows that I was there except Eugenia Claiborne, and I'm perfectly certain she'll never tell any one."

Dorrington thought his daughter should have a little lecture, and he gave her one, but not of the conventional kind. He simply drew her to him and kissed her, saying, "My precious child, you must never forget the message the little boy sent you. About the last thing he said was, 'Tell my Miss Nan to be dood.'" And you know, my dear, that it is neither proper nor good for my little girl to be wandering about at night. She is now a young lady, and she must begin to act like one —not too much, you know, but just enough to be good."

Now, you may depend upon it, this kind of talk, accompanied by a smile of affection, went a good deal farther with Nan than the most tremendous scolding would have gone. It touched her where she was weakest —or, if you please, strongest—in her affections, and she vowed to herself that she would put off her hoyden ways, and become a demure young lady, or at least play the part to the best of her ability.

Eugenia Claiborne declared that Nan had acted more demurely in the closet than she could have done, if, instead of Gabriel, Paul Tomlin had come spying on the radicals where she was. "I don't see how you could help saying something. If I had been in your place, and Paul had come in there, I should certainly have said something to him, if only to let him know that I was as

patriotic as he was." Miss Eugenia had grand ideas about patriotism.

"Oh, if it had been Paul instead of Gabriel I would have made myself known," said Nan; "but Gabriel——"

"I don't see what the difference is when it comes to making yourself known to any one in the dark, especially to a friend," remarked Eugenia. "For my part, horses couldn't have dragged me in that awful place. I'm sure you must be very brave, to make up your mind to go there. Weren't you frightened to death?"

"Why there was nothing to frighten any one," said Nan; "not even rats."

"Ooh!" cried Eugenia with a shiver. "Why of course there were rats in that dark, still place. I wouldn't go in there in broad daylight."

This conversation occurred while Nan was visiting Eugenia, and in the course thereof, Nan was given to understand that her friend thought a good deal of Paul Tomlin. As soon as Nan grasped the idea that Eugenia was trying to convey—there never was a girl more obtuse in love-matters—she became profuse in her praises of Paul, who was really a very clever young man. As Mrs. Absalom had said, it was not likely that he would ever be brilliant enough to set the creek on fire, but he was a very agreeable lad, entirely unlike Silas Tomlin, his father.

If Eugenia thought that Nan would exchange confidences with her, she was sadly mistaken. Nan had a horror of falling in love, and when the name of Gabriel

was mentioned by her friend, she made many scornful allusions to that youngster.

"But you know, Nan, that you think more of Gabriel than you do of any other young man," said Eugenia. "You may deceive yourself and him, but you can't deceive me. I knew the moment I saw you together the first time that you were fond of him; and when I was told by some one that you were to marry Mr. Bethune, I laughed at them."

"I'm glad you did," replied Nan. "I care no more for Frank Bethune than for Gabriel. I'll tell you the truth, if I thought I was in love with a man, I'd hate him; I wouldn't submit to it."

"Well, you have been acting as if you hate Gabriel," suggested Eugenia.

"Oh, I don't like him half as well as I did when we were playfellows. I think he's changed a great deal. His grandmother says he's timid, but to me it looks more like conceit. No, child," Nan went on with an affectation of great gravity; "the man that I marry must be somebody. He must be able to attract the attention of everybody."

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to move away from this town, or remain an old maid," said the other. "Or it may be that Gabriel will make a great man. He and Paul belong to a debating society here in town, and Paul says that Gabriel can make as good a speech as any one he ever heard. They invited some of the older men not long ago, and mother heard Mr. Tomlin say that Gabriel would make a great orator some day. Paul thinks

there is nobody in the world like Gabriel. So you see he is already getting to be famous."

"But will he ever wear a red feather in his hat and a red sash over his shoulder?" inquired Nan gravely. She was reverting now to the ideal hero of her girlish dreams.

"Why, I should hope not," replied Eugenia. "You don't want him to be the laughing-stock of the people, do you?"

"Oh, I'm not anxious for him to be anything," said Nan, "but you know I've always said that I never would marry a man unless he wore a red feather in his hat, and a red sash over his shoulder."

"When I was a child," remarked Eugenia, "I always said I would like to marry a pirate—a man with a long black beard, a handkerchief tied around his head to keep his hair out of his eyes, and a shining sword in one hand and a pistol in the other."

"Oh, did you?" cried Nan, snuggling closer to her friend. "Let's talk about it. I am beginning to be very old, and I want to talk about things that make me feel young again."

But they were not to talk about their childish ideals that day, for a knock came on the door, and Margaret Gaither was announced—Margaret, who seemed to have no ideals, and who had confessed that she never had had any childhood. She came in dignified and sad. Her face was pale, and there was a weary look in her eyes, a wistful expression, as if she desired very much to be able to be happy along with the rest of the people around her.

The two girls greeted her very cordially. Both were fond of her, and though they could not understand her troubles, she had traits that appealed to both. She could be lively enough on occasion, and there was a certain refinement of manner about her that they both tried to emulate—whenever they could remember to do so.

"I heard Nan was here," she said, with a beautiful smile, "and I thought I would run over and see you both together."

"That is a fine compliment for me," Eugenia declared.

"Miss Jealousy!" retorted Margaret, "you know I am over here two or three times a week—every time I can catch you at home. But I wish you were jealous," she added with a sigh. "I think I should be perfectly happy if some one loved me well enough to be jealous."

"You ought to be very happy without all that," said Nan.

"Yes, I know I should be; but suppose you were in my shoes, would you be happy?" She turned to the girls with the gravity of fate itself. As neither one made any reply, she went on: "See what I am—absolutely dependent on those who, not so very long ago, were entire strangers. I have no claims on them whatever. Oh, don't think I am ungrateful," she cried in answer to a gesture of protest from Nan. "I would make any sacrifice for them—I would do anything—but you see how it is. I can do nothing; I am perfectly helpless. I but really, I ought not to talk so before you two children."

"Children! well, I thank you!" exclaimed Eugenia,

rising and making a mock curtsey. "Nan is nearly as old as you are, and I am two days older."

"No matter; I have no business to be bringing my troubles into this giddy company; but as I was coming across the street, I happened to think of the difference in our positions. Talk about jealousy! I am jealous and envious. Yes, and mean; I have terrible thoughts sometimes. I wouldn't dare to tell you what they are."

"I know better," said Nan; "you never had a mean thought in your life. Aunt Fanny says you are the sweetest creature in the world."

"Don't! don't tell me such things as that, Nan. You will run me wild. There never was another woman like Aunt Fanny. And, oh, I love her! But if I could get away and become independent, and in some way pay them back for all they have done for me, and for all they hope to do, I'd be the happiest girl in the world."

"I think I know how you feel," said Nan, with a quick apprehension of the situation; "but if I were in your place, and couldn't help myself, I wouldn't let it trouble me much."

"Very well said," Mrs. Claiborne remarked, as she entered the room. "Nan, you are becoming quite a philosopher. And how is Margaret?" she inquired, kissing that blushing maiden on the cheek.

"I am quite well, I thank you, but I'd be a great deal better if I thought you hadn't heard my foolish talk."

"I heard a part of it, and it wasn't foolish at all. The feeling does you credit, provided you don't carry

it too far. You are alone too much; you take your feelings too seriously. You must remember that you are nothing but a child; you are just beginning life. You should cultivate bright thoughts. My dear, let me tell you one thing—if Pulaski Tomlin had any idea that you had such feelings as you have expressed here, he would be miserable; he would be miserable, and you would never know it. You said something about gratitude; well if you want to show any gratitude and make those two people happy, be happy yourself—and if you can't really be happy, pretend that you are happy. And the first thing you know, it will be a reality. Now, I have had worse troubles than ever fell to your portion and if I had brooded over them, I should have been miserable. Your lot is a very fortunate one, as you will discover when you are older."

This advice was very good, though it may have a familiar sound to the reader, and Margaret tried hard for the time being to follow it. She succeeded so well that her laughter became as loud and as joyous as that of her companions, and when she returned home, her countenance was so free from care and worry that both Neighbour Tomlin and his sister remarked it, and they were the happier for it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Silas Tomlin Scents Trouble

ONE day—it was a warm Saturday, giving promise of a long hot Sunday to follow—Mr. Sanders was on his way home, feeling very blue indeed. He had been to town on no particular business—the day was a half-holiday with the field-hands—and he had wandered about aimlessly, making several unsuccessful efforts to crack a joke or two with such acquaintances as he chanced to meet. He had concluded that his liver was out of order, and he wondered, as he went along, if he would create much public comment and dissatisfaction if he should break his promise to Nan Dorrington by purchasing a jug of liquor and crawling into the nearest shuck-pen. It was on this warm Saturday, the least promising of all days, as he thought, that he stumbled upon an adventure which, for a season, proved to be both interesting and amusing.

He was walking along, as has been said, feeling very blue and uncomfortable, when he heard his name called, and, turning around, saw a negro girl running after him. She came up panting and grinning.

"Miss Ritta say she wish you'd come dar right now," said the girl. "I been runnin' an' hollin atter you tell

I wuz fear'd de dogs 'd take atter me. Miss Ritta say she want to see you right now."

The girl was small and very slim, bare-legged and good-humoured. Mr. Sanders looked at her hard, but failed to recognise her; nor had he the faintest idea as to the identity of "Miss Ritta." The girl bore his scrutiny very well, betraying a tendency to dance. As Mr. Sanders tried in vain to place her in his memory, she slapped her hands together, and whirled quickly on her heel more than once.

"You're a way yander ahead of me," he remarked, after reflecting awhile. "I reckon I've slipped a cog some'rs in my machinery. What is your name?"

"I'm name Larceeny. Don't you know me, Marse Billy? I use ter b'long ter de Clopton Cadets, when Miss Nan was de Captain; but I wan't ez big den ez I is now. I been knowin' you most sence I was born."

"What is your mammy's name?"

"My mammy name Creecy," replied the girl, grinning broadly. "She cookin' fer Miss Ritta."

Mr. Sanders remembered Creecy very well. She had belonged to the Gaither family before the war. "Where do you stay?" he inquired. He was not disposed to admit, even indirectly, that he didn't know every human being in the town.

"I stays dar wid Miss Ritta," replied Larceeny. "I goes ter de do', an' waits on Miss Nugeeny."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders, with a smile of satisfaction. Here was a clew. Miss Nugeeny must be Eugenia Claiborne, and Miss Ritta was probably her mother.

"Miss Ritta say she wanter see you right now," insisted Larceeny. "When she seed you on de street, you wuz so fur, she couldn't holla at you, an' time she call me outer de gyarden, you wuz done gone. I wuz at de fur een' er de gyarden, pickin' rasbe'ies, an' I had ter drap ever'thing."

"Do you pick raspberries with yóur mouth?" inquired Mr. Sanders, with a very solemn air.

"Is my mouf dat red?" inquired Larceeny, with an alarmed expression on her face. She seized her gingham apron by the hem, and, using the underside, proceeded to remove the incriminating stains, remarking, "I'm mighty glad you tol' me, kaze ef ol' Miss Polly had seed dat—well, she done preach my funer'l once, an' I don't want ter hear it no mo'."

Mr. Sanders, following Larceeny, proceeded to the Gaither Place, and was ushered into the parlour, where, to his surprise, he found Judge Vardeman, of Rockville, one of the most distinguished lawyers of the State. Mr. Sanders knew the Judge very well, and admired him not only on account of his great ability as a lawyer, but because of the genial simplicity of his character. They greeted each other very cordially, and were beginning to discuss the situation—it was the one topic that never grew stale during that sad time—when Mrs. Claiborne came in; she had evidently been out to attend to some household affairs.

"I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Sanders," she said. "I have sent for you at the suggestion of Judge Vardeman, who is a kinsman of mine by marriage. He is

surprised that you and I are not well acquainted; but I tell him that in such sad times as these, it is a wonder that one knows one's next-door neighbours."

Mr. Sanders made some fitting response, and as soon as he could do so without rudeness, closely studied the countenance of the lady. There was a vivacity, a gaiety, an archness in her manner that he found very charming. Her features were not regular, but when she laughed or smiled, her face was beautiful. If she had ever experienced any serious trouble, Mr. Sanders thought, she had been able to bear it bravely, for no marks of it were left on her speaking countenance. "Give me a firm faith and a light heart," says an ancient writer, "and the world may have everything else."

"I have sent for you, Mr. Sanders," said the lady, laughing lightly, "to ask if you will undertake to be my drummer."

"Your drummer!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders. "Well, I've been told that I have a way of blowin' my own horn, when the weather is fine and the spring sap is runnin', but as for drummin', I reely hain't got the knack on it."

"Oh, I only want you to do a little talking here and there, and give out various hints and intimations—you know what I mean. I am anxious to even up matters with a friend of yours, who, I am afraid, isn't any better than he should be."

While the lady was talking, Mr. Sanders was staring at a couple of crayon portraits on the wall. He rose from his seat, walked across the room, and attentively

studied one of the portraits. It depicted a man between twenty-five and thirty-five.

"Well, I'll be jigged!" he exclaimed as he resumed his seat. "Ef that ain't Silas Tomlin I'm a Dutchman!"

"Why, I shouldn't think you would recognise him after all these years," the lady said, smiling brightly. "Don't you think the portrait flatters him?"

"Quite a considerbul," replied Mr. Sanders; "but Silas has got p'ints about his countenance that a coat of tar wouldn't hide. Trim his eyebrows, an' give him a clean, close shave, an' he's e'en about the same as he was then. An' ef I ain't mighty much mistaken, the pictur' by his side was intended to be took for you. The feller that took it forgot to put the right kind of a sparkle in the eye, an' he didn't ketch the laugh that oughter be hov'rin' round the mouth, like a butterfly tryin' to light on a pink rose; but all in all, it's a mighty good likeness."

"Now, don't you think I should thank Mr. Sanders?" said the lady, turning to Judge Vardeman. "It has been many a day since I have had such a compliment. Actually, I believe I am blushing!" and she was.

"It wasn't much of a compliment to the artist," the Judge suggested.

"Well, when it comes to paintin' a purty 'oman," remarked Mr. Sanders, "it's powerful hard for to git in all the p'ints. A feller could paint our picturs in short order, Judge. A couple of kags of pink paint, a whitewash brush, an' two or three strokes, bold an' free, would do the business."

The Judge's eye twinkled merrily, and Mrs. Claiborne laughingly exclaimed, "Why, you'd make quite an artist. You certainly have an eye for colour."

Thereupon Judge Vardeman suggested to Mrs. Claiborne that she begin at the beginning, and place Mr. Sanders in possession of all the facts necessary to the successful carrying out of the plan she had in view. It was a plan, the Judge went on to say, that he did not wholly indorse, bordering, as it did, on frivolity, but as the lady was determined on it, he would not advise against it, as the results bade fair to be harmless.

It must have been quite a story the lady had to tell Mr. Sanders, for the sun was nearly down when he came from the house; and it must have been somewhat amusing, too, for he came down the steps laughing heartily. When he reached the sidewalk, he paused, looked back at the closed door, shook his head, and threw up his hands, exclaiming to himself, "Bless Katy! I'm powerful glad I ain't got no 'oman on my trail. 'Specially one like her. Be jigged ef she don't shake this old town up!"

He heard voices behind him, and turned to see Eugenia Claiborne and Paul Tomlin walking slowly along, engaged in a very engrossing conversation. Mr. Sanders looked at the couple long enough to make sure that he was not mistaken as to their identity, and then he went on his way.

He had intended to go straight home, but, yielding to a sudden whim or impulse, he went to the tavern instead. This old tavern, at a certain hour of the day, was the resort of all the men, old and young, who de-

sired to indulge in idle gossip, or hear the latest news that might be brought by some stray traveller, or commercial agent, or cotton-buyer from Malvern. For years, Mr. Woodruff, the proprietor—he had come from Vermont in the forties, as a school-teacher—complained that the hospitality of the citizens was enough to ruin any public-house that had no gold mine to draw upon. But, after the war, the tide, such as it was, turned in his favour, and by the early part of 1868, he was beginning to profit by what he called "a pretty good line of custom," and there were days in the busy season when he was hard put to it to accommodate his guests in the way he desired.

During the spring and summer months, there was no pleasanter place than the long, low veranda of Mr. Woodruff's tavern, and it was very popular with those who had an idle hour at their disposal. This veranda was much patronised by Mr. Silas Tomlin, who, after the death of his wife, had no home-life worthy of the name. Silas was not socially inclined; he took no part in the gossip and tittletattle that flowed up and down the veranda. The most interesting bit of news never caused him to turn his head, and the raciest anecdote failed to bring a smile to his face. Nevertheless, nothing seemed to please him better than to draw a chair some distance away from the group of loungers, yet not out of earshot, lean back against one of the supporting pillars, close his eyes and listen to all that was said, or dream his own dreams, such as they might be.

Mr. Sanders was well aware of Silas Tomlin's tavern

habits, and this was what induced him to turn his feet in that direction. He expected to find Silas there at this particular hour and he was not disappointed. Silas was sitting aloof from the crowd, his chair leaning against one of the columns, his legs crossed, his eyes closed, and his hands folded in his lap. But for an occasional nervous movement of his thin lips, and the twitching of his thumbs, he might have served as a model for a statue of Repose. As a matter of fact, all his faculties were alert.

The crowd of loungers was somewhat larger than usual, having been augmented during the day by three commercial agents and a couple of cotton-buyers. Lawyer Tidwell was taking advantage of the occasion to expound and explain several very delicate and intricate constitutional problems. Mr. Tidwell was a very able man in some respects, and he was a very good talker, although he wanted to do all the talking himself. He lowered his voice slightly, as he saw Mr. Sanders, but kept on with his exposition of our organic law.

"Hello, Mr. Sanders!" said one of the cotton-buyers, taking advantage of a momentary pause in Mr. Tidwell's monologue; "how are you getting on these days?"

"Well, I was gittin' on right peart tell to-day, but this mornin' I struck a job that's made me weak an' w'ary."

"You're looking mighty well, anyhow. What has been the trouble to-day?"

"Why, I'll tell you," responded Mr. Sanders, with a show of animation. "I've been gwine round all day

tryin' to git up subscriptions for to build a flatform for Gus Tidwell. Gus needs a place whar he can stand an' explutterate on the Constitution all day, and not be in nobody's way."

"Well, of course you succeeded," remarked Mr. Tidwell, good-naturedly.

"Middlin' well—middlin' well. A coloured lady flung a dime in the box, an' I put in a quarter. In all, I reckon I've raised a dollar an' a half. But I reely believe I could 'a' raised a hunderd dollars ef I'd 'a' told 'em whar the flatform was to be built."

"Where is that?" some one inquired.

"In the pine-thicket behind the graveyard," responded Mr. Sanders, so earnestly and promptly that the crowd shouted with laughter. Even Mr. Tidwell, who was "case-hardened," as Mrs. Absalom would say, to Mr. Sanders's jokes, joined in with the rest.

"Gus is a purty good lawyer," said Mr. Sanders, lifting his voice a little to make sure that Silas Tomlin would hear every syllable of what he intended to say; "but he'll never be at his best till he finds out that the Constitution, like the Bible, can be translated to suit the idees of any party or any crank. But I allers brag on Gus because I believe in paternizin' home industries. Howsomever, between us boys an' gals, an' not aimin' for it to go any furder, there's a lawyer in town to-day—an' maybe he'll be here to-morrow—who knows more about the law in one minnit than Gus could tell you in a day and a half. An' when it comes to explutterations on p'ints of constitutional law, Gus wouldn't be in it."

"Is that so? What is the gentleman's name?" asked Mr. Tidwell.

"Judge Albert Vardeman," replied Mr. Sanders. "Now, when you come to talk about lawyers, you'll be doin' yourself injustice ef you leave out the name of Albert Vardeman. He ain't got much of a figure—he's shaped somethin' like a gourdful of water—but I tell you he's got a head on him."

"Is the Judge really here?" Mr. Tidwell asked. "I'd like very much to have a talk with him."

"I don't blame you, Gus," remarked Mr. Sanders, "you can git more straight p'ints from Albert Vardeman than you'll find in the books. He's been at Mrs. Claiborne's all day; I reckon she's gittin' him to ten' to some law business for her. They's some kinder kinnery betwixt 'em. His mammy's cat ketched a rat in her gran'mammy's smokehouse, I reckon. We've got more kinfolks in these diggin's, than they has been sence the first generation arter Adam."

At the mention of Mrs. Claiborne's name Silas Tomlin opened his eyes and uncrossed his legs. This movement caused him to lose his balance, and his chair fell from a leaning position with a sharp bang.

"What sort of a dream did you have, Silas?" Mr. Sanders inquired with affected solicitude. "You'd better watch out; Dock Dorrin'ton says that when a man gits bald-headed, it's a sign that his bones is as brittle as glass. He found that out on one of his furrin trips."

"Don't worry about me, Sanders," replied Silas. He tried to smile.

"Well, I don't reckon you could call it worry, Silas, bekaze when I ketch a case of the worries, it allers sends me to bed wi' the jimmyjon. I can be neighbourly wi'out worryin', I hope."

"For a woman with a grown daughter," remarked Mr. Tidwell, speaking his thoughts aloud, as was his habit, "Mrs. Claiborne is well preserved—very well preserved." Mr. Tidwell was a widower, of several years' standing.

"Why, she's not only preserved, she's the preserves an' the preserver," Mr. Sanders declared. "To look in her eye an' watch her thoughts sparklin' like fire, to watch her movements, an' hear her laugh, not only makes a feller young agin, but makes him glad he's a-livin'. An' that gal of her'n—well, she's a thoroughbred. Did you ever notice the way she holds her head? I never see her an' Nan Dorrington together but what I'm sorry I never got married. I'd put up wi' all the tribulation for to have a gal like arry one on 'em."

Mr. Sanders paused a moment, and then turned to Silas Tomlin. "Silas, I think Paul is fixin' for to do you proud. As I come along jest now, him an' Jinny Claiborne was walkin' mighty close together. They must 'a' been swappin' some mighty sweet secrets, bekaze they hardly spoke above a whisper. An' they didn't look like they was in much of a hurry."

While Mr. Sanders was describing the scene he had witnessed, exaggerating the facts to suit his whimsical humour, Silas Tomlin sat bold upright in his chair, his eyes half-shut, and his thin lips working nervously.

"Paul knows which side his bread is buttered on," he snapped out.

"Bread!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders, pretending to become tremendously excited; "bread! shorely you must mean poun'-cake, Silas. And whoever heard of putting butter on poun'-cake?"

When the loungers began to disperse, some of them going home, and others going in to supper in response to the tavern bell, Mr. Silas Tomlin called to Lawyer Tidwell, and the two walked along together, their homes lying in the same direction.

"Gus," said Silas, somewhat nervously, "I want to put a case to you. It's purely imaginary, and has probably never happened in the history of the world."

"You mean what we lawyers call a hypothetical case," remarked Mr. Tidwell, in a tone that suggested a spacious and a tolerant mind.

"Precisely," replied Mr. Silas Tomlin, with some eagerness. "I was readin' a tale in an old copy of *Blackwood's Magazine* the other day, an' the whole business turned on just such a case. The sum and substance of it was about this: A man marries a woman and they get along together all right for awhile. Then, all of a sudden she takes a mortal dislike to the man, screams like mad when he goes about her, and kicks up generally when his name is mentioned. He, being a man of some spirit, and rather touchy at best, finally leaves her in disgust. Finally her folks send him word that she is dead. On the strength of that information, he marries again, after so long a time. All goes well for eighteen or twenty

years, and then suddenly the first wife turns up. Now what, in law, is the man's status? Where does he stand? Is this woman really his wife? "

"Why, certainly," replied Mr. Tidwell. "His second marriage is no marriage at all. The issue of such a marriage is illegitimate."

"That's just what I thought," commented Silas Tomlin. "But in the tale, when the woman comes back, and puts in her claim, the judge flings her case out of court."

"That was in England," Mr. Tidwell suggested.

"Or Scotland—I forget which," Silas Tomlin replied.

"Well, it isn't the law over here," Mr. Tidwell declared confidently. They walked on a little way, when the lawyer suddenly turned to Silas and said: "Mr. Tomlin, will you fetch that magazine in to-morrow? I want to see the ground on which the woman's case was thrown out. It's interesting, even if it is all fiction. Perhaps there was some technicality."

"All right, Gus; I'll fetch it in to-morrow."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Silas Tomlin Finds Trouble

WHEN Silas Tomlin reached home, he found his son reading a book. No word of salutation passed between them; Paul simply changed his position in the chair, and Silas grunted. They had no confidences, and they seemed to have nothing in common. As a matter of fact, however, Silas was very fond of this son, proud of his appearance—the lad was as neat as a pin, and fairly well-favoured,—and proud of his love for books. Unhappily, Silas was never able to show his affection and his fair-haired son never knew to his dying day how large a place he occupied in his father's heart. Miserly Silas was with money, but his love for his son was boundless. It destroyed or excluded every other sentiment or emotion that was in conflict with it. His miserliness was for his son's sake, and he never put away a dollar without a feeling of exultation; he rejoiced in the fact that it would enable his son to live more comfortably than his father had cared to live. Silas loved money, not for its own sake, but for the sake of his son.

Mrs. Absalom would have laughed at such a statement. The social structure of the Southern people, and the habits and traditions based thereon, were of such a char-

acter that a great majority could not be brought to believe that it was possible for parsimony to exist side by side with any of the finer feelings. All the conditions and circumstances, the ability to command leisure, the very climate itself, promoted hospitality, generosity, open-handedness, and that fine spirit of lavishness that seeks at any cost to give pleasure to others. Popular opinion, therefore, looked with a cold and suspicious eye on all manifestations of selfishness.

But Silas Tomlin's parsimony, his stinginess, had no selfish basis. He was saving not for himself, but for his son, in whom all his affections and all his ambitions were centred. He had reared Paul tenderly without displaying any tenderness, and if the son had speculated at all in regard to the various liberties he had been allowed, or the indulgent methods that had been employed in his bringing up, he would have traced them to the carelessness and indifference of his father, rather than to the ardent affection that burned unseen and unmarked in Silas's bosom.

He had never, by word or act, intentionally wounded the feelings of his son; he had never thrown himself in the path of Paul's wishes. There was a feeling in Shady Dale that Silas was permitting his son to go to the dogs; whereas, as a matter of fact, no detective was ever more alert. Without seeming to do so, he had kept an eye on all Paul's comings and goings. When the lad's desires were reasonable, they were promptly gratified; when they were unreasonable, their gratification was postponed until they were forgotten. Books Paul had

in abundance. Half of the large library of Meredith Tomlin had fallen to Silas, and the other half to Pulaski Tomlin, and the lad had free access to all.

Paul was very fond of his Uncle Pulaski and his Aunt Fanny, and he was far more familiar with these two than he was with his father. His association with his uncle and aunt was in the nature of a liberal education. It was Pulaski Tomlin who really formed Paul's character, who gathered together all the elements of good that are native to the mind of a sensitive lad, and moulded them until they were strong enough to outweigh and overwhelm the impulses of evil that are also native to the growing mind. Thus it fell out that Paul was a young man to be admired and loved by all who find modest merit pleasing.

When his father arrived at home on that particular evening, as has been noted, Paul was reading a book. He changed his position, but said nothing. After awhile, however, he felt something was wrong. His father, instead of seating himself at the table, and consulting his note-book, walked up and down the floor.

"What is wrong? Are you ill?" Paul asked after awhile.

"No, son; I am as well in body as ever I was; but I'm greatly troubled. I wish to heaven I could go back to the beginning, and tell you all about it; but I can't —I just can't."

Paul also had his troubles, and he regarded his father gloomily enough. "Why can't you tell me?" he asked, somewhat impatiently. "But I needn't ask you that;

you never tell me anything. I heard something to-day that made me ashamed."

"Ashamed, Paul?" gasped his father.

"Yes—ashamed. And if it is true, I am going away from here and never show my face again."

Silas fell, rather than leaned, against the mantel-piece, his face ghastly white. He tried to say, "What did you hear, Paul?" His lips moved, but no sound issued from his throat.

"Two or three persons told me to-day," Paul went on, "that they had heard of your intention to join the radicals, and run for the legislature. I told each and every one of them that it was an infernal lie; but I don't know whether it is a lie or not. If it isn't I'll leave here."

Silas Tomlin's heart had been in his throat, as the saying is, but he gulped it down again and smiled faintly. If this was all Paul had heard, well and good. Compared with some other things, it was a mere matter of moonshine. Paul took up his book again, but he turned the leaves rapidly, and it was plain that he was impatiently waiting for further information.

At last Silas spoke: "All the truth in that report, Paul, is this—It has been suggested to me that it would be better for the whites here if some one who sympathises with their plans, and understands their interests, should pretend to become a Republican, and make the race for the legislature. This is what some of our best men think."

"What do you mean by our best men, father?"

"Why, I don't know that I am at liberty to mention names even to you, Paul," said Silas, who had no notion of being driven into a corner. "And then, on the other hand, the white Republicans are not as fond of the negroes as they pretend to be. And if they can't get some native-born white man to run, who do you reckon they'll have to put up as a candidate? Why, old Jerry, Pulaski's man of all work."

"Well, what of it?" Paul asked with rising indignation. "Jerry is a great deal better than any white man who puts himself on an equality with him."

"Have you met Mr. Hotchkiss?" asked Silas. "He seems to be a very clever man."

"No, I haven't met him and I don't want to meet him." Paul rose from his seat, and stood facing his father. He was a likely-looking young man, tall and slim, but broad-shouldered. He had the delicate pink complexion that belongs to fair-haired persons. "This is a question, father, that can't be discussed between us. You beat about the bush in such a way as to compel me to believe the reports I have heard are true. Well, you can do as you like; I'll not presume to dictate to you. You may disgrace yourself, but you sha'n't disgrace me."

With that, the high-strung young fellow seized his hat, and flung out of the house, carrying his book with him. He shut the door after him with a bang, as he went out, demonstrating that he was full of the heroic indignation that only young blood can kindle.

Silas Tomlin sank into a chair, as he heard the street-door slammed. "Disgrace him! My God! I've already

disgraced him, and when he finds it out he'll hate me. Oh, Lord!" If the man's fountain of tears had not been dried up years before, he would have wept scalding ones.

An inner door opened and a negro woman peeped in. Seeing no one but Silas, she cried out indignantly, "Who dat slammin' dat front do'? You'll break eve'y glass in de house, an' half de crock'ry-ware in de dinin'-room, an' den you'll say I done it."

"It was Paul, Rhody; he was angry about something."

The negro woman gave an indignant snort. "I don't blame 'im—I don't blame 'im; not one bit. Ain't I been tellin' you how 'twould be? Ain't I been tellin' you dat you'd run 'im off wid yo' scrimpin' an' pinchin'? But 'tain't dat dat run'd 'im off. It's sump'n wuss'n dat. He ain't never done dat away befo'. Ef dat boy ain't had de patience er Job, he'd 'a' been gone fum here long ago."

Rhody came into the room where she could look Silas in the eyes. He regarded her with curiosity, which appeared to be the only emotion left him. Certainly he had never seen his cook and aforetime slave in such a tantrum. What would she say and do next?

"Home!" she exclaimed in a loud voice. Then she turned around and deliberately inspected the room as if she had never seen it before. "An' so dis is what you call Home—you, wid all yo' money hid away in holes in de groun'! Dis de kinder place you fix up fer dat boy, an' him de onliest one you got! Well!" Rhody's indignation could only be accounted for on the ground that

she had overheard the whole conversation between father and son.

"Why, you never said anything about it before," remarked Silas Tomlin.

"No, I didn't, an' I wouldn't say it now, ef dat boy hedn't 'a' foun' out fer hisse'f what kinder daddy he got."

"Blast your black hide! I'll knock your brains out if you talk that way to me!" exclaimed Silas Tomlin, white with anger.

"Well, I bet you nobody don't knock yo' brains out," remarked Rhody undismayed. "An' while I'm 'bout it, I'll tell you dis: Yo' supper's in dar in de pots an' pans; ef you want it you go git it an' put on de table, er set flat on de h'ath an' eat it. Dat chile's gone, an' I'm gwine."

"You dratted fool!" Silas exclaimed, "you know Paul hasn't gone for good. He'll come back when he gets hungry, and be glad to come."

"Is you ever seed him do dis away befo' sence he been born?" Rhody paused and waited for a reply, but none was forthcoming. "No, you ain't! no, you ain't! You don't know no mo' 'bout dat chile dan ef he want yone. But I—me—ol' Rhody—I know 'im. I kin look at 'im sideways an' tell ef he feelin' good er bad er diffunt. What you done done ter dat chile? Tell me dat."

But Silas Tomlin answered never a word. He sat glowering at Rhody in a way that would have subdued and frightened a negro unused to his ways. Rhody

started toward the kitchen, but at the door leading to the dining-room she paused and turned around. "Oh, you got a heap ter answer fer—a mighty heap; an' de day will come when you'll bar in mind eve'y word I been tellin' you 'bout dat chile fum de time he could wobble 'roun' an' call me mammy."

With that she went out. Silas heard her moving about in the back part of the house, but after awhile all was silence. He sat for some time communing with himself, and trying in vain to map out some consistent course of action. What a blessing it would be, he thought, if Paul would make good his threat, and go away! It would be like tearing his father's heart-strings out, but better that than that he should remain and be a witness to his own disgrace, and to the bitter humiliation of his father.

Silas had intended to warn his son that he was throwing away his time by going with Eugenia Claiborne—that marriage with her was utterly impossible. But it was a very delicate subject, and, once embarked in it, he would have been unable to give his son any adequate or satisfactory reason for the interdiction. Many wild and whirling thoughts passed through the mind of Silas Tomlin, but at the end, he asked himself why he should cross the creek before he came to it?

The reflection was soothing enough to bring home to his mind the fact that he had had no supper. Unconsciously, and through force of habit, he had been waiting for Rhody to set the small bell to tinkling, as a signal that the meal was ready, but no sound had come to his ears. He rose to investigate. A solitary candle was

flaring on the dining-table. He went to the door leading to the kitchen and called Rhody, but he received no answer.

"Blast your impudent hide!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing out there? Why don't you put supper on the table?"

He would have had silence for an answer, but for the barking of a nearby neighbour's dog. He went into the kitchen, and found the fire nearly out, whereupon he made dire threats against his cook, but, in the end, he was compelled to fish his supper from the pans as best he could.

When he had finished he looked at the clock, and was surprised to find that it was only a little after eight. During the course of an hour and a half, he seemed to have lived and suffered a year and a half. The early hour gave him an opportunity to display one of his characteristic traits. It had never been his way to run from trouble. When a small boy, if his nurse told him the booger-man was behind a bush, he always insisted on investigating. The same impulse seized him now. If this Mrs. Claiborne proposed to make any move against him—as he inferred from the hints which the jovial Mr. Sanders had flung at his head—he would beard the lioness in her den, and find out what she meant, and what she wanted.

Silas was prompt to act on the impulse, and as soon as he could make the house secure, he proceeded to the Gaither Place. His knock, after some delay, was answered by Eugenia. The girl involuntarily drew back

when she saw who the visitor was. "What is it you wish?" she inquired.

"If your mother is at home, please ask her if she will see Silas Tomlin on a matter of business."

Eugenia left the door open, and in a moment, from one of the rear rooms came the sound of merry, unrestrained laughter, which only ceased when some one uttered a warning "Sh-h!"

Eugenia returned almost immediately, and invited the visitor into the parlour, saying, "It is rather late for business, mamma says, but she will see you."

Silas seated himself on a sofa, and had time to look about him before the lady of the house came in. It was his second visit to Mrs. Claiborne, and he observed many changes had taken place in the disposition of the furniture and the draperies. He noted, too, with a feeling of helpless exasperation, that his own portrait hung on the wall in close proximity to that of Rita Claiborne. He clenched his hands with inward rage. "What does this she-devil mean?" he asked himself, and at that moment, the object of his anger swept into the room. There was something gracious, as well as graceful, in her movements. She had the air of a victor who is willing to be magnanimous.

"What is your business with me?" she asked with lifted eyebrows. There was just the shadow of a smile hovering around her mouth. Silas caught it, and looking into a swinging mirror opposite, he saw how impossible it was for a man with a weazened face and a skull-cap to cope with such a woman as this. However, he

had his indignation, his sense of persecution, to fall back upon.

"I want to know what you intend to do," said Silas. There was a note of weakness and helplessness in his voice. "I want to know what to expect. I'm tired of leading a dog's life. I hear you have been colloguing with lawyers."

"Do you remember your first visit here?" inquired Mrs. Claiborne very sweetly. If she was an enemy, she certainly knew how to conceal her feelings. "Do you remember how wildly you talked—how insulting you were?"

"I declare to you on my honour that I never intended to insult you," Silas exclaimed.

"Why, all your insinuations were insulting. You gave me to understand that my coming here was an outrage—as if you had anything to do with my movements. But you insisted that my coming here was an attack on you and your son. When and where and how did I ever do you a wrong?"

"Why didn't you—didn't—" Silas tried hard to formulate his wrongs, but they were either so many or so few that words failed him.

"Did I desert you when you were ill and delirious? Did I put faith in an anonymous letter and believe you to be dead?" The lady spoke with a calmness that seemed to be unnatural and unreal.

For a little while, Silas made no reply, but sat like one dazed, his eyes fixed on the crayon portrait of himself. "Did you hang that thing up there for Paul to

see it and ask questions about it?" he asked, after awhile.

"I hung it there because I chose to," she replied. "Judge Vardeman thinks it is a very good likeness of you, but I don't agree with him. Do you think it does you justice?" she asked.

"And then there's Paul," said Silas, ignoring her question. "Do you propose to let him go ahead and fall in love with the girl?"

"Paul is not my son," the lady calmly answered.

"But the girl is your daughter," Silas insisted.

"I shall look after her welfare, never fear," said the lady.

"But suppose they should take a notion to marry; what would you do to stop 'em?"

"Oh, well, that is a question for the future," replied the lady, serenely. "It will be time enough to discuss that matter when the necessity arises."

Her composure, her indifference, caused Silas to writhe and squirm in his chair, and she, seeing the torture she was inflicting, appeared to be very well content.

"I didn't come to argue," said Silas presently. "I came for information; I want to know what you intend to do. I don't ask any favours and I don't want any; I'm getting my deserts, I reckon. What I sowed that I'm reaping."

"Ah!" the lady exclaimed softly, and with an air of satisfaction. "Do you really feel so?" She leaned forward a little, and there was that in her eyes that denoted something else besides satisfaction; compassion shone there. Her mood had not been a serious one up

to this point, but she was serious now, and Silas could but observe how beautiful she was. "Do you really feel that I would be justified if I confirmed the suspicions you have expressed?"

"So far as I am concerned, you'd be doing exactly right," said Silas bluntly. "But what about Paul?"

"Well, what about Paul?" Mrs. Claiborne asked.

"Well, for one thing, he's never done you any harm. And there's another thing," said Silas rising from his seat: "I'd be willing to have my body pulled to pieces, inch by inch, and my bones broken, piece by piece, to save that boy one single pang."

He stood towering over the lady. For once he had been taken clean out of himself, and he seemed to be transfigured. Mrs. Claiborne rose also.

"Paul is a very good young man," she said.

"Yes, he is!" exclaimed Silas. "He never had a mean thought, and he has never been guilty of a mean action. But that would make no difference in my feelings. It would be all the same to me if he was a thief and a scoundrel or if he was deformed, or if he was everything that he is not. No matter what he was or might be, I would be willing to live in eternal torment if I could know that he is happy."

His face was not weazened now. It was illuminated with his love for his son, the one passion of his life, and he was no longer a contemptible figure. The lady refixed her eyes upon him, and wondered how he could have changed himself right before her eyes, for certainly, as it seemed to her, this was not the mean and

shabby figure she had found in the parlour when she first came in. She sighed as she turned her eyes away.

"Do you remember what I told you on the occasion of your first visit?" she inquired very seriously. "You were both rude and disagreeable, but I said that I'd not trouble you again, so long as you left me alone."

"Well, haven't I left you alone?" asked Silas.

"What do you call this?" There was just the shadow of a smile on her face.

"That's a fact," said Silas after a pause. "But I just couldn't help myself. Honestly I'm sorry I came. I'm no match for you. I must bid you good-night. I hardly know what's come over me. If I've worried you, I'm truly sorry."

"One of these days," she said very kindly, as she accompanied him to the door, "I'll send for you. At the proper time I'll give you some interesting news."

"Well, I hope it will be good news; if so, it will be the first I have heard in many a long day. Good-night."

The lady closed the door, and returned to the parlour and sat down. "Why, I thought he was a cold-blooded, heartless creature," she said to herself. Then, after some reflection she uttered an exclamation and clasped her hands together. Suppose he were to make way with himself! The bare thought was enough to keep the smiles away from the face of this merry-hearted lady for many long minutes. Finally, she caught a glimpse of herself in the swinging mirror. She snapped her fingers at her reflection, saying, "Pooh! I wouldn't give that for your firmness of purpose!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Rhody Has Something to Say

NOW, all this time, while the mother was engaged with Silas, Eugenia, the daughter, was having an experience of her own. When Rhody, Silas Tomlin's cook and housekeeper, discovered that Paul had left the house in a fit of anger, she knew at once that something unusual had occurred, and her indignation against Silas Tomlin rose high. She was familiar with every peculiarity of Paul's character, and she was well aware of the fact that behind his calm and cool bearing, which nothing ever seemed to ruffle, was a heart as sensitive and as tender as that of a woman, and a temper hot, obstinate and unreasonable when aroused.

So, without taking time to serve Silas's supper, she went in search of Paul. She went to the store where he was the chief clerk, but the doors were closed; she went to the tavern, but he was not to be seen; and she walked along the principal streets, where sometimes the young men strolled after tea. There she met a negro woman, who suggested that he might be at the Gaither Place. "Humph!" snorted Rhody, "how come dat ain't cross my mind? But ef he's dar dis night, ef he run ter dat

gal when he in trouble, I better be layin' off ter cook some weddin' doin's."

There wasn't a backyard in the town that Rhody didn't know as well as she knew her own, and she stood on no ceremony in entering any of them. She went to the Gaither Place, swung back the gate, shutting it after her with a bang, and stalked into the kitchen as though it belonged to her. At the moment there was no one in sight but Mandy, the house-girl, a bright and good-looking mulatto.

"Why, howdy, Miss Rhody!" she exclaimed, in a voice that sounded like a flute. "What wind blowed you in here?"

"Put down dem dishes an' wipe yo' han's," said Rhody, by way of reply. The girl silently complied, expressing no surprise and betraying no curiosity. "Now, den, go in de house, an' ax ef Paul Tomlin is in dar," commanded Rhody. "Ef he is des tell 'im dat Mammy Rhody want ter see 'im."

"I hope dey ain't nobody dead," suggested Mandy with a musical laugh. "I'm lookin' out for all sorts er trouble, because I've had mighty funny dreams for three nights han'-runnin'. Look like I can see blood. I wake up, I do, cryin' an' feelin' tired out like de witches been ridin' me. Then I drop off to sleep, an' there's the blood, plain as my han'."

She went on in the house and Rhody followed close at her heels. She was determined to see Paul if she could. She was very willing for Silas Tomlin to be drawn through a hackle; she was willing to see murder

done if the whites were to be the victims; but Paul—well, according to her view, Paul was one of a thousand. She had given him suck; she had fretted and worried about him for twenty years; and she couldn't break off her old habits all at once. She had listened to and indorsed the incendiary doctrines of the radical emissary who pretended to be representing the government; she had wept and shouted over the strenuous pleadings of the Rev. Jeremiah; but all these things were wholly apart from Paul. And if she had had the remotest idea that they affected his interests or his future, she would have risen in the church and denounced the carpet-bagger and his scalawag associates, and likewise the Rev. Jeremiah.

When Mandy, closely followed by Rhody, went into the house, she heard voices in the parlour, but Eugenia was in the sitting-room reading by the light of a lamp.

"Miss Genia," said the girl, "is Mr. Paul here?"

"Why do you ask?" inquired Eugenia.

"They-all cook wanter speak with him." At this moment, Eugenia saw the somewhat grim face of Rhody peering over the girl's shoulder.

"Paul isn't here," said the young lady, rising with a vague feeling of alarm. "What is the matter?" And then, feeling that if there was any trouble, Rhody would feel freer to speak when they were alone together, Eugenia dismissed Mandy, and followed to see that the girl went out. "Now, what *is* the trouble, Rhody? Mr. Silas Tomlin is in the parlour talking to mother."

Rhody opened her eyes wide at this. "*He* in dar?

What de name er goodness he doin' here?" Eugenia didn't know, of course, and said so. "Well, he ain't atter no good," Rhody went on; "you kin put dat down in black an' white. Dat man is sho' ter leave a smutty track wharsomever he walk at. You better watch 'im; you better keep yo' eye on 'im. Is he yever loant yo' ma any money?"

"Why, no," replied Eugenia, laughing at the absurdity of the question. "What put that idea in your head?"

"Bekaze dat's his business—loanin' out a little dab er money here an' a little dab dar, an' gittin' back double de dab he loant," said Rhody. "Deyer folks in dis county, which he loant um money, an' now he got all de prop'ty dey yever had; an' deyer folks right here in dis town, which he loant um dat ar Conferick money when it want wuff much mo dan shavin's, an' now dey got ter pay 'im back sho nuff money. I hear 'im sesso. Oh, dat's him! dat's Silas Tomlin up an' down. You kin take a thrip an' squeeze it in yo' han' tell it leave a print, an' hol' it up whar folks kin see it, an' dar you got his pictur'; all it'll need will be a frame. He done druv Paul 'way fum home."

She spoke with some heat, and really went further than she intended, but she was swept away by her indignation. She was certain, knowing Paul as well as she did, that he had left the house in a fit of anger at something his father had said or done and she was equally as certain that he would have to be coaxed back.

"Surely you are mistaken," said Eugenia. "It is

too ridiculous. Why, Paul—Mr. Paul is——" She paused and stood there blushing.

"Go on, chile: say it out; don't be shame er me. Nobody can't say nothin' good 'bout dat boy but what I kin put a lots mo' on what dey er tellin'. Silas Tomlin done tol' me out'n his own mouf dat Paul went fum de house vowin' he'd never come back."

Eugenia was so sure that Rhody (after her kind and colour) was exaggerating, that she refused to be disturbed by the statement. "Why did you come here hunting for Paul?" the young lady asked.

"Oh, go away, Miss Genia!" exclaimed Rhody, laughing. "'Tain't no needs er my answerin' dat, kaze you know lots better'n I does."

"Are you very fond of him?" Eugenia inquired.

"Who—*me?* Why, honey, I raised 'im. Sick er well, I nussed 'im fer long years. I helt 'im in deze arms nights an' nights, when all he had ter do fer ter leave dis vale wuz ter fetch one gasp an' go. Ef his daddy had done all dat, he wouldn't 'a' druv de boy fum home."

Alas! how could Rhody, in her ignorance and blindness, probe the recesses of a soul as reticent as that of Silas Tomlin?

"Oh, don't say he was driven from home!" cried Eugenia, rising and placing a hand on Rhody's arm. "If you talk that way, other people will take it up, and it won't be pleasant for Paul."

"Dat sho is a mighty purty han'," exclaimed Rhody enthusiastically, ignoring the grave advice of the young woman. "I'm gwine ter show somebody de place whar

you laid it, an' I bet you he'll wanter cut de cloff out an' put it in his alvum."

Eugenia made a pretence of pushing Rhody out of the room, but she was blushing and smiling. "Well'm, he ain't here, sho, an' here's whar he oughter be; but I'll fin' 'im dis night an' ef he ain't gwine back home, I ain't gwine back—you kin put dat down." With that, she bade the young lady good-night, and went out.

As Rhody passed through the back gate, she chanced to glance toward Pulaski Tomlin's house, and saw a light shining from the library window. "Ah-yi!" she exclaimed, "he's dar, an' dey ain't no better place fer 'im. Dey's mo' home fer 'im right dar den dey yever wus er yever will be whar he live at."

So saying, she turned her steps in the direction of Neighbour Tomlin's. In the kitchen, she asked if Paul was in the house. The cook didn't know, but when the house-girl came out, she said that Mr. Paul was there, and had been for some time. "Deyer holdin' a reg'lar expeunce meetin' in dar," she said. "Miss Fanny sho is a plum sight!"

The house-girl went in again to say that Rhody would like to speak with him, and Rhody, as was her custom, followed at her heels.

"Come in, Rhody," said Miss Fanny. "I know you are there. You always send a message, and then go along with it to see if it is delivered correctly. 'Twould save a great deal of trouble if the rest of us were to adopt your plan."

"I hope you all is well," remarked Rhody, as she

made her appearance. "I declar', Miss Fanny, you look good enough to eat."

"Well, I do eat," responded Miss Fanny, teasingly.

"I mean you look good enough ter be etted," said Rhody, correcting herself.

"Now, that is what I call a nice compliment," Miss Fanny observed complacently. "Brother Pulaski, if I am ever 'etted' you won't have to raise a monument to my memory."

"No wonder you look young," laughed Rhody. "Anybody what kin git fun out'n a graveyard is bleeze ter look young."

Paul was lying on the wide lounge that was one of the features of the library. His eyes were closed, and his Aunt Fanny was gently stroking his hair. Pulaski Tomlin leaned back in an easy chair, lazily enjoying a cigar, the delicate flavour of which filled the room. There was something serene and restful in the group, in the furniture, in all the accessories and surroundings. The negro woman turned around and looked at everything in the room, as if trying to discover what produced the effect of perfect repose.

It is the rule that everything beautiful and precious in this world should have mystery attached to it. There is the enduring mystery of art, the mystery that endows plain flesh and blood with genius. A little child draws you by its beauty; there is mystery unfathomable in its eyes. You enter a home, no matter how fine, no matter how humble; it may be built of logs, and its furnishings may be of the poorest; but if it is a home, a

real home, you will know it unmistakably the moment you step across the threshold. Some subtle essence, as mysterious as thought itself, will find its way to your mind and enlighten your instinct. You will know, however fine the dwelling, whether the spirit of home dwells there.

Rhody, as she looked around in the vain effort to get a clew to the secret, wondered why she always felt so comfortable in this house. She sighed as she seated herself on the floor at the foot of the lounge on which Paul lay. This was her privilege. If Miss Fanny could sit at his head, Rhody could sit at his feet.

"You wanted to speak to Paul," suggested Miss Fanny.

"Yes'm; he lef' de house in a huff, an' I wanter know ef he gwine back—kaze ef he ain't, I'm gwineter move way fum dar. He ain't take time fer ter git his supper."

"Why, Paul!" exclaimed Miss Fanny.

"I couldn't eat a mouthful to save my life," said Paul.

"Whar Miss Margaret?" Rhody inquired; and she seemed pleased to hear that the young lady was spending the night with Nan Dorrington. "Honey," she said to Paul, "how come yo' pa went ter de Gaither Place ternight? What business he got dar?"

This was news to Paul, and he could make no reply to Rhody's question. He reflected over the matter a little while. "Was he really there?" he asked finally.

"I hear 'im talkin' in de parlour, an' Miss Genia say it's him."

"What were *you* doing there?" inquired Miss Fanny, pushing her jaunty grey curls behind her ears.

"A coloured 'oman recommen' me ter go dar ef I wan' ter fin' dat chile."

"Why, Paul! And is the wind really blowing in that quarter?" cried Miss Fanny, leaning over and kissing him on the forehead.

"Now, Mammy Rhody, why did you do that?" Paul asked with considerable irritation. "What will Miss Eugenia and her mother think?" He sat bolt upright on the sofa.

"Well, her ma ain't see me, an' Miss Genia look like she wuz sorry I couldn't fin' you dar."

Miss Fanny laughed, but Rhody was perfectly serious. "Miss Fanny," she said, turning to the lady, "how come dat chile lef' home?"

"Shall I tell her, Paul? I may as well." Whereupon she told the negro woman the cause of Paul's anger, and ended by saying that she didn't blame him for showing the spirit of a Southern gentleman.

"Well, he'll never j'ine de 'Publican Party in dis county," Rhody declared emphatically.

"He will if he has made up his mind to do so. You don't know Silas," said Miss Fanny.

"Who—me? Me not know dat man? Huh! I know 'im better'n he know hisse'f; an' I know some yuther folks, too. I tell you right now, he'll never j'ine: an' ef you don't believe me, you wait an' see. Time I git thoo wid his kayeter, de 'Publicans won't tetch 'im wid a ten-foot pole."

"I hope you are right," said Pulaski Tomlin, speaking for the first time. "There's enough trouble in

the land without having a scalawag in the Tomlin family."

"Well, you nee'nter worry 'bout dat, kaze I'll sho put a stop ter dem kinder doin's. Honey," Rhody went on, addressing Paul, "you come on home when you git sleepy; I'm gwineter set up fer you, an' ef you don't come, yo' pa 'll hatter cook his own vittles ter-morrer mornin'."

"Good-night, Rhody, and pleasant dreams," said Miss Fanny, as the negro woman started out.

"I dunner how anybody kin have pleasin' drams ef dey sleep in de same lot wid Marse Silas," replied Rhody. "Good-night all."

Now, the cook at the Tomlin Place was the wife of the Rev. Jeremiah. She was a tall, thin woman, some years older than her husband, and she ruled him with a rod of iron. The new conditions, combined with the insidious flattery of the white radicals, had made her vicious against the whites. Rhody knew this, and from the "big house," she went into the kitchen, where Mrs. Jeremiah was cleaning up for the night. Her name was Patsy.

"You gittin' mighty thick wid de white folks, Sis' Rhody," said Patsy, pausing in her work, as the other entered the door.

For answer, Rhody fell into a chair, held both hands high above her head, and then let them drop in her lap. The gesture was effective for a dozen interpretations. "Well!" she exclaimed, and then paused, Patsy watching her narrowly the while. "I dunner how 'tis wid you, Sis' Patsy, but wid me, it's live an' l'arn—live an' l'arn.

An' I'm a-larnin', mon, spite er de fack dat de white folks think niggers ain't got no sense."

"Dey does! Dey does!" exclaimed Patsy. "Dey got de idee dat we all ain't got no mo' sense dan a passel er fryin'-size chickens. But dey'll fin' out better, an' den—Ah-h-h!" This last exclamation was a hoarse guttural cry of triumph.

"You sho is talkin' now!" cried Rhody, with an admiring smile. "I knows it ter-night, ef I never is know'd it befo'."

Patsy knew that some disclosure was coming, and she invited it by putting Rhody on the defensive. "It's de trufe," she declared. "Dat what make me feel so quare, Sis' Rhody, when I see you so ready fer ter collogue wid de white folks. I wuz talkin' wid Jerry 'bout it no longer'n las' night. Yes'm, I wuz. I say, 'Jerry, what de matter wid Sis' Rhody?' He say, 'Which away, Pidgin?'—desso; he allers call me Pidgin," explained Patsy, with a smile of pride. "I say, 'By de way she colloguin' wid de white folks.'"

"What Br'er Jerry say ter dat?" inquired Rhody.

"He des shuck his head an' groan," was the reply.

Rhody leaned forward with a frown that was almost tragic in its heaviness, and spoke in a deep, unnatural tone that added immensely to the emphasis of her words. "'Oman, lemme tell you: I done it, an' I'm glad I done it; an' you'll be glad I done it; an' he'll be glad I done it." Patsy was drying the dish-pan with a towel, but suspended operations the better to hear what Rhody had to say. "Dey done got it fixt up fer ol' Silas ter j'ine

in wid de 'Publican Party. He gwineter j'ine so he kin fin' out all der doin's, an' all der comin's an' der gwines, so he kin tell de yuthers."

"Huh! Oh, yes—yes, yes, yes! Oh, yes! We er fools; we ain't got no sense!" cackled Patsy viciously.

"He des gwineter make out he's a 'Publican," Rhody went on; "dey got it all planned. He gwineter j'ine de Nunion League, an' git all de names. Dey talk 'bout it, Sis' Patsy, right befo' my face an' eyes. Dey mus' take me fer a start-natchel fool."

"Dey does—dey does!" cried Patsy; "dey takes us all fer fools. But won't dey be a wakin' up when de time come?"

Then and there was given the death-blow to Silas Tomlin's ambition to become a Republican politician. The Rev. Jeremiah was apprised of the plan, which so far as Rhody was concerned, was a pure invention. Word went round, and when Silas put in his application to become a member of the Union League, he was informed that orders had come from Atlanta that no more members were to be enrolled.

When Rhody went out into the street, after her talk with Patsy, a passer-by would have said that her actions were very queer. She leaned against the fence and went into convulsions of silent laughter. "Oh, I wish I wuz some'rs whar I could holler," she said aloud between gasps. "He calls her 'Pidgin!' Pidgin! Ef she's a pidgin, I'd like ter know what gone wid de cranes!"

She recurred to this name some weeks afterward, when the Rev. Jeremiah informed her confidentially that his

wife had discovered Silas Tomlin's plan to unearth the secrets of the Union League. Rhody's comment somewhat surprised the Rev. Jeremiah. "I allers thought," she said with a laugh, "dat Pidgin had sump'n else in her craw 'sides corn."

Rhody waited in the kitchen that night until Paul returned, and then she went to bed. Silas and his son were up earlier than usual the next morning, but they found breakfast ready and waiting. The attitude of father and son toward each other was constrained and reserved. Silas felt that he must certainly say something to Paul about Eugenia Claiborne. He hardly knew how to begin, but at last he plunged into the subject with the same shivering sense of fear displayed by a small boy who is about to jump into a pond of cold water—dreading it, and yet determined to take a header.

"I hear, Paul," he began, "that you are very attentive to Eugenia Claiborne."

"I call on her occasionally," said Paul. "She is a very agreeable young lady." He spoke coolly, but the blood mounted to his face.

"So I hear—so I hear," remarked Silas in a businesslike way. "Still, I hope you won't carry matters too far."

"What do you mean?" Paul inquired.

"I wish I could go into particulars; I wish I could tell you exactly what I mean, but I can't," said Silas. "All I can say is that it would be impossible for you to marry the young woman. My Lord!" he exclaimed, as he saw Paul close his jaws together. "Ain't there no other woman in the world?"

"Do you know anything against the young lady's character?" the son asked.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," was the response.

"Well," said Paul, "I hadn't considered the question of marriage at all, but since you've brought the subject up, we may as well discuss it. You say it will be impossible for me to marry this young lady, and you refuse to tell me why. Don't you think I am old enough to be trusted?"

"Why, certainly, Paul—of course; but there are some things—" Silas paused, and caught his breath, and then went on. "Honestly, Paul, if I could tell you, I would; I'd be glad to tell you; but this is a matter in which you will have to depend on my judgment. Can't you trust me?"

"Just as far as you can trust me, but no farther," was the reply. "I'm not a child. In a few months I'll be of age. But if I were only ten years old, and knew the young lady as well as I know her now, you couldn't turn me against her by insinuations." He rose, shook himself, walked the length of the room and back again, and stood close to his father. "You've already settled the question of marriage. I asked you last night about the report that you intended to act with the radicals, and you refused to give me a direct answer. That means that the report is true. Do you suppose that Eugenia Claiborne, or any other decent woman would marry the son of a scalawag?" he asked with a voice full of passion. "Why, she'd spit in his face, and I wouldn't blame her."

The young man went out, leaving Silas sitting at the table. "Lord! I hate to hurt him, but he'd better be dead than to marry that girl."

Rhody, who was standing in the entryway leading from the dining-room to the kitchen, and who had overheard every word that passed between father and son, entered the room at this moment, exclaiming:

"Well, you des ez well call 'im dead den, kaze marry her he will, an' I don't blame 'im; an' mo'n dat I'll he'p 'im all I can."

"You don't know what you are talking about," said Silas, wiping his lips, which were as dry as a bone.

"Maybe I does, an' maybe I don't," replied Rhody. "But what I does know, I knows des ez good ez anybody. You say dat boy sha'n't marry de gal; but how come you courtin' de mammy?"

"Doing what?" cried Silas, pushing his chair back from the table.

"Courtin' de mammy," answered Rhody, in a loud voice. "You wuz dar las' night, an' fer all I know you wuz dar de night befo', an' de night 'fo' dat. You may fool some folks, but you can't fool me."

"Courting! Why you blasted idiot! I went to see her on business."

Rhody laughed so heartily that few would have detected the mockery in it. "Business! Yasser; it's business, an' mighty funny business. Well, ef you kin git her, you take her. Ef she don't lead you a dance, I ain't name Rhody."

"I believe you've lost what little sense you used to have," said Silas with angry contempt.

"I notice dat nobody roun' here ain't foun' it," remarked Rhody, retiring to the kitchen with a waiter full of dishes.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Knights of the White Camellia

MATTERS have changed greatly since those days, and all for the better. The people of the whole country understand one another, and there is no longer any sectional prejudice for the politicians to feed and grow fat upon. But in the days of reconstruction everything was at white heat, and every episode and every development appeared to be calculated to add to the excitement. In all this, Shady Dale had as large a share as any other community. The whites had witnessed many political outrages that seemed to have for their object the renewal of armed resistance. And it is impossible, even at this late day, for any impartial person to read the debates in the Federal Congress during the years of 1867-68 without realising the awful fact that the prime movers in the reconstruction scheme (if not the men who acted as their instruments and tools) were intent on stirring up a new revolution in the hope that the negroes might be prevailed upon to sack cities and towns, and destroy the white population. This is the only reasonable inference; no other conceivable conclusion can explain the wild and whirling words that were uttered in these debates: un-

less, indeed, some charitable investigator shall establish the fact that the radical leaders were suffering from a sort of contagious dementia.

It is all over and gone, but it is necessary to recall the facts in order to explain the passionate and blind resistance of the whites of the South and their hatred of everything that bore the name or earmarks of Republicanism. Shady Dale, in common with other communities, had witnessed the assembling of a convention to frame a new constitution for the State. This body was well named the mongrel convention. It was made up of political adventurers from Maine, Vermont, and other Northern States, and boasted of a majority composed of ignorant negroes and criminals. One of the most prominent members had served a term in a Northern penitentiary. The real leaders, the men in whose wisdom and conservatism the whites had confidence, were disqualified from holding office by the terms of the reconstruction acts, and the convention emphasised and adopted the policy of the radical leaders in Washington —a policy that was deliberately conceived for the purpose of placing the governments of the Southern States in the hands of ignorant negroes controlled by men who had no interest whatever in the welfare of the people.

But this was not all, nor half. When the military commandant who had charge of affairs in Georgia, found that the State government established under the terms of Mr. Lincoln's plan of reconstruction, had no idea of paying the expenses of the mongrel convention out of the State's funds, he issued an order removing the Gov-

ernor and Treasurer, and "detailed for duty as Governor of Georgia," one of the members of his staff.

The mongrel convention, which would have been run out of any Northern State in twenty-four hours, had provided for an election to be held in April, 1868, for the ratification or rejection of the new constitution that had been framed, and for the election of Governor and members of the General Assembly. Beginning on the 20th, the election was to continue for three days, a provision that was intended to enable the negroes to vote at as many precincts as they could conveniently reach in eighty-three hours. No safeguard whatever was thrown around the ballot-box, and it was the remembrance of this initial and overwhelming combination of fraud and corruption that induced the whites, at a later day, to stuff the ballot-boxes and suppress the votes of the ignorant.

These things, with the hundreds of irritating incidents and episodes belonging to the unprecedented conditions, gradually worked up the feelings of the whites to a very high pitch of exasperation. The worst fears of the most timid bade fair to be realised, for the negroes, certain of their political supremacy, sure of the sympathy and support of Congress and the War Department, and filled with the conceit produced by the flattery and cajolery of the carpet-bag sycophants, were beginning to assume an attitude which would have been threatening and offensive if their skins had been white as snow.

Gabriel was now old enough to appreciate the situation as it existed, though he never could bring himself

to believe that there were elements of danger in it. He knew the negroes too well; he was too familiar with their habits of thought, and with their various methods of accomplishing a desired end. But he was familiar with the apprehensions of the community, and made no effort to put forward his own views, except in occasional conversations with Meriwether Clopton. After a time, however, it became clear, even to Gabriel, that something must be done to convince the misguided negroes that the whites were not asleep.

He conformed himself to all the new conditions with the ready versatility of youth. He studied hard both night and day, but he spent the greater part of his time in the open air. It was perhaps fortunate for him at this time that there was a lack of formality in his methods of acquiring knowledge. He had no tutor, but his line of study was mapped out for him by Meriwether Clopton, who was astonished at the growing appetite of the lad for knowledge—an appetite that seemed to be insatiable.

What he most desired to know, however, he made no inquiries about. He ached, as Mrs. Absalom would have said, to know why he had suddenly come to be afraid of Nan Dorrington. He had been somewhat shy of her before, but now, in these latter days, he was absolutely afraid of her. He liked her as well as ever, but somehow he became panic-stricken whenever he found himself in her company, which was not often.

It was impossible that his desire to avoid her should fail to be observed by Nan, and she found a reason for

it in the belief that Gabriel had discovered in some way that she was in the closet with Tasma Tid the night the Union League had been organised. Nan would never have known what a crime—this was the name she gave the escapade—what a crime she had committed but for the shock it gave her step-mother. This lady had been trained and educated in a convent, where every rule of propriety was emphasised and magnified, and most rigidly insisted upon.

One day, when Nan was returning home from the village, she saw Gabriel coming directly toward her. She studied the ground at her feet for a considerable distance, and when she looked up again Gabriel was gone; he had disappeared. This episode, insignificant though it was, was the cause of considerable worry to Nan. She gave Mrs. Dorrington the particulars, and then asked her what it all meant.

"Why should it mean anything?" that lady asked with a laugh.

"Oh, but it must mean something, Johnny. Gabriel has avoided me before, and I have avoided him, but we have each had some sort of an excuse for it. But this time it is too plain."

"What silly children!" exclaimed Mrs. Dorrington, with her cute French accent.

Nan went to a window and looked out, drumming on a pane. Outside everything seemed to be in disorder. The flowers were weeds, and the trees were not beautiful any more. Even the few birds in sight were all dressed in drab. What a small thing can change the world for us!

"I know why he hid himself," Nan declared from the window. "He has found out that I was in the closet with Tasma Tid." How sad it was to be compelled to realise the awful responsibilities that rest as a burden upon Girls who are Grown!

"Well, you were there," replied Mrs. Dorrington, "and since that is so, why not make a joke of it? Gabriel has no squeamishness about such things."

"Then why should he act as he does?" Nan was about to break down.

"Well, he has his own reasons, perhaps, but they are not what you think. Oh, far from it. Gabriel knows as well as I do that it would be impossible for you to do anything *very* wrong."

"Oh, but it isn't impossible," Nan insisted. "I feel wicked, and I know I am wicked. If Gabriel Tolliver ever dares to find out that I was in that closet, I'll tell him what I think of him, and then I'll—" Her threat was never completed. Mrs. Dorrington rose from her chair just in time to place her hand over Nan's mouth.

"If you were to tell Gabriel what you really think of him," said the lady, "he would have great astonishment."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't, Johnny. You don't know how conceited Gabriel is. I'm just ready to hate him."

"Well, it may be good for your health to dislike him a little occasionally," remarked Mrs. Dorrington, with a smile.

"Now, what *do* you mean by that, Johnny?" cried

Nan. But the only reply she received was an eloquent shrug of the shoulders.

Gabriel was as much mystified by his own dread of meeting Nan, as he was by her coolness toward him. He could not recall any incident which she had resented; but still she was angry with him. Well, if it was so, so be it; and though he thought it was cruel in his old comrade to harbour hard thoughts against him, he never sought for an explanation. He had his own world to fall back upon—a world of books, the woods and the fields. And he was far from unhappiness; for no human being who loves Nature well enough to understand and interpret its meaning and its myriad messages to his own satisfaction, can be unhappy for any length of time. Whatever his losses or his disappointments, he can make them all good by going into the woods and fields and taking Nature, the great comforter, by the hand.

So Gabriel confined his communications for the most part to his old and ever-faithful friends, the woods and the velvety Bermuda fields. He walked about among these old friends with a lively sense of their vitality and their fruitfulness. He was certain that the fields knew him as well as he knew them—and as for the trees, he had a feeling that they knew his name as well as he knew theirs. He was so familiar with some of them, and they with him, that the katydids in the branches continued their cries even while he was leaning against the trunks of the friends of his childhood: whereas, if a stranger or an alien to the woods had so much as laid

the tip of his little finger on the rugged bark of one of them, a shuddering signal would have been sent aloft, and the cries would have ceased instantly.

Gabriel's grandmother went to bed early and rose early —a habit that belongs to old age. But it was only after the darkness and silence of night had descended upon the world that all of Gabriel's faculties were alert. It was his favourite time for studying and reading, and for walking about in the woods and fields, especially when the weather was too warm for study. Every Sunday night found him in the Bermuda fields, long since deserted by Nan and Tasma Tid. To think of the old days sometimes brought a lump in his throat; but the skies, and the constellations (in their season) remained, and were as fresh and as beautiful as when they looked down in pity on the sufferings of Job.

Gabriel's favourite Bermuda field was crowned by a hill, which, gradually sloping upward, commanded a fine view of the surrounding country; and though it was close to Shady Dale, it was a lonely place. Here the killdees ran, and bobbed their heads, and uttered their plaintive cries unmolested; here the partridge could raise her brood in peace; and here the whippoorwill was free to play upon his flute.

Many and many a time, while sitting on this hill, Gabriel had watched the village-lights go out one by one till all was dark; and the silence seemed to float heavenward, and fall again, and shift and move in vast undulations, keeping time to a grand melody which the soul could feel and respond to, but which the ear could not

hear. And at such time, Gabriel believed that in the slow-moving constellations, with their glittering trains, could be read the great secrets that philosophers and scientists are searching for.

Beyond the valley, still farther away from the town, was the negro church, of which the Rev. Jeremiah Tomlin was the admired pastor. Ordinarily, there were services in this church three times a week, unless one of the constantly recurring revivals was in progress, and then there were services every night in the week, and sometimes all night long. The Rev. Jeremiah was a preacher who had lung-power to spare, and his voice was well calculated to shatter our old friend the welkin, so dear to poets and romancers. But if there was no revival in progress, the nights devoted to prayer-meetings were mainly musical, and the songs, subdued by the distance, floated across the valley to Gabriel with entrancing sweetness.

One Wednesday night, when the political conditions were at their worst, Gabriel observed that while the lights were lit in the church, there was less singing than usual. This attracted his attention and then excited his curiosity. Listening more intently, he failed to hear the sound of a single voice lifted in prayer, in song or in preaching. The time was after nine o'clock, and this silence was so unusual that Gabriel concluded to investigate.

He made his way across the valley, and was soon within ear-shot of the church. The pulpit was unoccupied, but Gabriel could see that a white man was standing in front of it. The inference to be drawn from his move-

ments and gestures was that he was delivering an address to the negroes. Hotchkiss was standing near the speaker, leaning in a familiar way on one of the side projections of the pulpit. Gabriel knew Hotchkiss, but the man who was speaking was a stranger. He was flushed as with wine, and appeared to have no control of his hands, for he flung them about wildly.

Gabriel crept closer, and climbed a small tree, in the hope that he might hear what the stranger was saying, but listen as he might, no sound of the stranger's voice came to Gabriel. The church was full of negroes, and a strange silence had fallen on them. He marvelled somewhat at this, for the night was pleasant, and every window was open. The impression made upon the young fellow was very peculiar. Here was a man flinging his arms about in the heat and ardour of argument or exhortation, and yet not a sound came through the windows.

Suddenly, while Gabriel was leaning forward trying in vain to hear the words of the speaker, a tall, white figure, mounted on a tall white horse, emerged from the copse at the rear of the church. At the first glance, Gabriel found it difficult to discover what the figures were, but as horse and rider swerved in the direction of the church, he saw that both were clad in white and flowing raiment. While he was gazing with all his eyes, another figure emerged from the copse, then another, and another, until thirteen white riders, including the leader, had come into view. Following one another at intervals, they marched around the church, observing the most profound silence. The hoofs of their horses made no

sound. Three times this ghostly procession marched around the church. Finally they paused, each horseman at a window, save the leader, who, being taller than the rest, had stationed himself at the door.

He was the first to break the silence. "Brothers, is all well with you?" his voice was strong and sonorous.

"All is not well," replied twelve voices in chorus.

"What do you see?" the impressive voice of the leader asked.

"Trouble, misery, blood!" came the answering chorus.

"Blood?" cried the leader.

"Yes, blood!" was the reply.

"Then all is well!"

"So mote it be! All is well!" answered twelve voices in chorus.

Once more the ghostly procession rode round and round the church, and then suddenly disappeared in the darkness. Gabriel rubbed his eyes. For an instant he believed that he had been dreaming. If ever there were goblins, these were they. The figures on horseback were so closely draped in white that they had no shape but height, and their heads and hands were not in view.

It may well be believed that the sudden appearance and disappearance of these apparitions produced consternation in the Rev. Jeremiah's congregation. The stranger who had been addressing them was left in a state of collapse. The only person in the building who appeared to be cool and sane was the man Hotchkiss. The negroes sat paralysed for an instant after the white riders had disappeared—but only for an instant, for, before you

could breathe twice, those in the rear seats made a rush for the door. This movement precipitated a panic, and the entire congregation joined in a mad effort to escape from the building. The Rev. Jeremiah forgot the dignity of his position, and, umbrella in hand, emerged from a window, bringing the upper sash with him. Benches were overturned, and wild shrieks came from the women. The climax came when five pistol-shots rang out on the air.

Gabriel, in his tree, could hear the negroes running, their feet sounding on the hard clay like the furious scamper of a drove of wild horses. Years afterward, he could afford to laugh at the events of that night, but, at the moment, the terror of the negroes was contagious, and he had a mild attack of it.

The pistol-shots occurred as the Rev. Jeremiah emerged from the window, and were evidently in the nature of a signal, for before the echoes of the reports had died away, the white horsemen came into view again, and rode after the fleeing negroes. Gabriel did not witness the effect of this movement, but it came near driving the fleeing negroes into a frenzy. The white riders paid little attention to the mob itself, but selected the Rev. Jeremiah as the object of their solicitude.

He had bethought him of his dignity when he had gone a few hundred steps, and found he was not pursued, and, instead of taking to the woods, as most of his congregation did, he kept to the public road. Before he knew it, or at least before he could leave the road, he found himself escorted by the entire band. Six rode

on each side, and the leader rode behind him. Once he started to run, but the white riders easily kept pace with him, their horses going in a comfortable canter. When he found that escape was impossible, he ceased to run. He would have stopped, but when he tried to do so he felt the hot breath of the leader's horse on the back of his neck, and the sensation was so unexpected and so peculiar, that the frightened negro actually thought that a chunk of fire, as he described it afterward, had been applied to his head. So vivid was the impression made on his mind that he declared that he had actually seen the flame, as it circled around his head; and he maintained that the back of his head would have been burned off if "de fier had been our kind er fier."

Finding that he could not escape by running, he began to walk, and as he was a man of great fluency of speech, he made an effort to open a conversation with his ghostly escort. He was perspiring at every pore, and this fact called for a frequent use of his red pocket-handkerchief.

"Blood!" cried the leader, and twelve voices repeated the word.

"Bosses—Marsters! What is I ever done to you?" To this there was no reply. "I ain't never hurted none er you-all; I ain't never had de idee er harmin' you. All I been doin' for dis long time, is ter try ter fetch sinners ter de mercy-seat. Dat's all I been doin', an' dat's all I wanter do—I tell you dat right now." Still there was no response, and the Rev. Jeremiah made bold to take a closer look at the riders who were within range

of his vision. He nearly sunk in his tracks when he saw that each one appeared to be carrying his head under his arm. "Name er de Lord!" he cried; "who is you-all anyhow? an' what you gwineter do wid me?"

Silence was the only answer he received, and the silence of the riders was more terrifying than their talk would have been. "Ef you wanter know who been tryin' fer ter 'casion trouble, I kin tell you, an' dat mighty quick." But apparently the white riders were not seeking for information. They asked no questions, and the perspiration flowed more freely than ever from the Rev. Jeremiah's pores. Again his red handkerchief came out of his pocket, and again the rider behind him cried out "Blood!" and the others repeated the word.

The Rev. Jeremiah, in despair, caught at what he thought was the last straw. "Ef you-all think dey's blood on dat hankcher, you mighty much mistooken. 'Twuz red in de sto', long 'fo' I bought it, an' ef dey's any blood on it, I ain't put it dar—I'll tell you dat right now."

But there was no answer to his protest, and the ghostly cortège continued to escort him along the road. The white riders went with him through town and to the Tomlin Place. Once there, each one filed between him and the gate he was about to enter, and the last word of each was "Beware!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Major Tomlin Perdue Arrives

GABRIEL was struck by the fact that Hotchkiss seemed to be undisturbed by the events that had startled and stampeded the negroes and the white stranger. He remained in the church for some time after the others were gone, and he showed no uneasiness whatever. He had seated himself on one of the deacons' chairs near the pulpit, and, with his head leaning on his hand, appeared to be lost in thought. After awhile—it seemed to be a very long time to Gabriel—he rose, put on his hat, blew out one by one the lamps that rested in sconces along the wall, and went out into the darkness.

Gabriel had remained in the tree, and with good reason. He knew that whoever fired the pistol, the reports of which added so largely to the panic among the negroes, was very close to the tree where he had hid himself, and so he waited, not patiently, perhaps, but with a very good grace. When Hotchkiss was out of sight, and presumably out of hearing, Gabriel heard some one calling his name. He made no answer at first, but the call was repeated in a tone sufficiently loud to leave no room for mistake.

"Tolliver, where are you? If you're asleep, wake up and show me a near-cut to town."

"Who are you?" Gabriel asked.

"One," replied the other.

"I don't know your voice," said Gabriel; "how did you know me?"

"That is a secret that belongs to the Knights of the White Camellia," answered the unknown. "If you don't come down, I'm afraid I'll have to shake you out of that tree. Can't you slide down without hurting your feelings?"

Gabriel slid down the trunk of the small tree as quickly as he could, and found that the owner of the voice was no other than Major Tomlin Perdue, of Halcyondale.

"You didn't expect to find me roosting around out here, did you?" the irrepressible Major asked, as he shook Gabriel warmly by the hand. "Well, I fully expected to find you. Your grandmother told me an hour ago that I'd find you mooning about on the hills back there. I didn't find you because I didn't care to go about bawling your name; so I came around by the road. I was loafing around here when you came up, and I knew it was you, as soon as I heard you slipping up that tree. But that hill business, and the mooning—how about them? You're in love, I reckon. Well, I don't blame you. She's a fine gal, ain't she?"

"Who?" inquired Gabriel.

"Who!" cried Major Perdue, mockingly. "Why, there's but one gal in the Dale. You know that as well

as I do. She never has had her match, and she'll never have one. And it's funny, too; no matter which way you spell her first name, backwards or forwards, it spells the same. Did you ever think of that, Tolliver? But for Vallie—you know my daughter, don't you?—I never would have found it out in the world."

Gabriel laughed somewhat sheepishly, wondering all the time how Major Perdue could think and talk of such trivial matters, in the face of the spectacle they had just witnessed.

"Well, you deserve good luck, my boy," the Major went on. "Everybody that knows you is singing your praises—some for your book-learning, some for your modesty, and some for the way you ferreted out the designs of that fellow who was last to leave the church."

"I'm sure I don't deserve any praise," protested Gabriel.

"Continue to feel that way, and you'll get all the more," observed the Major, sententiously. "But for you these dirty thieves might have got the best of us. Why, we didn't know, even at Haleyondale, what was up till we got word of your discovery. Well, sir, as soon as we found out what was going on, we got together, and wiped 'em up. Why, you've got the pokiest crowd over here I ever heard of. They just sit and sun themselves, and let these white devils do as they please. When they do wake up, the white rascals will be gone, and then they'll take their spite out of the niggers—and the niggers ain't no more to blame for all this trouble than a parcel of two-year-old children. You mark my words:

the niggers will suffer, and these white rascals will go scot-free. Why don't the folks here wake up? They can't be afraid of the Yankee soldiers, can they? Why the Captain here is a rank Democrat in politics, and a right down clever fellow."

"He is a clever gentleman," Gabriel assented. "I have met him walking about in the woods, and I like him very much. He is a Kentuckian, and he's not fond of these carpet-baggers and scalawags at all. But I never told anybody before that he is a good friend of mine. You know how they are, especially the women—they hate everything that's clothed in blue."

"Well, by George! you are the only person in the place that keeps his eyes open, and finds out things. You saw that rascal talking to the niggers awhile ago, didn't you? Well, he's the worst of the lot. He has been preaching his social equality doctrine over in our town, but I happened to run across him t'other day, and I laid the law down to him. I told him I'd give him twenty-four hours to get out of town. He stayed the limit; but when he saw me walk downtown with my shot-gun, he took a notion that I really meant business, and he lit out. Minervy Ann found out where he was headed for, and I've followed him over here. He's the worst of the lot, and they're all rank poison."

Major Perdue paused a moment in his talk, as if reflecting. "Can you keep a secret, Tolliver?" he asked after awhile.

"Well, I haven't had much practice, Major, but if it is important, I'll do my best to keep it."

"Oh, it is not so important. That fellow you saw talking to the negroes awhile ago is named Bridalbin."

"Bridalbin!" exclaimed Gabriel.

"Yes; he goes by some other name, I've forgotten what. He used to hang around Malvern some years before the war, and a friend of mine who lived there knew him the minute he saw him. He's the fellow that married Margaret Gaither; you remember her; she came home to die not so very long ago. Pulaski Tomlin adopted her daughter, or became the girl's guardian. Now, Tolliver, whatever you do, don't breathe a word about this Bridalbin—don't mention his name to a soul, not even to your grandmother. There's no need of worrying that poor girl; she has already had trouble enough in this world. I'm telling you about him because I want you to keep your eye on him. He's up to some kind of devilment besides exciting the niggers."

Gabriel promptly gave his word that he would never mention anything about Bridalbin's name, and then he said—"But this parade—what does it mean?"

The Major laughed. "Oh, that was just some of the boys from our settlement. They are simply out for practice. They want to get their hands in, as the saying is. They heard I was coming over, and so they followed along. They don't belong to the Kuklux that you've read so much about. A chap from North Carolina came along t'other day, and told about the Knights of the White Camellia, and the boys thought it would be a good idea to have a bouquet of their own. They have no signs or pass-words, but simply a general agree-

ment. You'll have to organise something of that kind here, Tolliver. Oh, you-all are so infernally slow out here in the country! Why, even in Atlanta, they have a Young Men's Democratic Club. You've got to get a move on you. There's no way out of it. The only way to fight the devil is to use his own weapons. The trouble is that some of the hot-headed youngsters want to hold the poor niggers responsible, as I said just now, and the niggers are no more to blame than the chicken in a new-laid egg. Don't forget that, Tolliver. I wouldn't give my old Minervy Ann for a hundred and seventy-five thousand of these white thieves and rascals; and Jerry Tomlin, fool as he is, is more of a gentleman than any of the men who have misled him."

They walked back to the village the way Gabriel had come. On top of the Bermuda hill, Major Perdue paused and looked toward Shady Dale. Lights were still twinkling in some of the houses, but for the most part the town was in darkness.

The Major waved his hand in that direction, remarking, "That's what makes the situation so dangerous, Tolliver—the women and the children. Here, and in hundreds of communities, and in the country places all about, the women and children are in bed asleep, or they are laughing and talking, with only dim ideas of what is going on. It looks to me, my son, as if we were between the devil and the deep blue sea. I, for one, don't believe that there's any danger of a nigger-rising. But look at the other side. I may be wrong; I may be a crazy old fool too fond of the niggers to believe they're

really mean at heart. Suppose that such men as this —ah, now I remember!—this Boring—that is what Bridalbin calls himself now—suppose that such men as he were to succeed in what they are trying to do? I don't believe they will, even if we took no steps to prevent it; but then there's the possibility—and we can't afford to take any chances."

Gabriel agreed with all this very heartily. He was glad to feel that his own views were also those of this keen, practical, hard-headed man of the world.

"But men of my sort will be misjudged, Tolliver," pursued the Major; "violent men will get in the saddle, and outrages will be committed, and injustice will be done. Public opinion to the north of us will say that the old fire-eaters, who won't permit even a respectable white man to insult them with impunity—the old slave-drivers—are trying to destroy the coloured race. But you will live, my son, to see some of these same radicals admit that all the injustice and all the wrong is due to the radical policy."

This prophecy came true. Time has abundantly vindicated the Major and those who acted with him.

"Yes, yes," Major Perdue went on musingly, "injustice will be done. The fact is, it has already begun in some quarters. Be switched if it doesn't look like you can't do right without doing wrong somewhere on the road."

Gabriel turned this paradox over in his mind, as they walked along; but it was not until he was a man grown that it straightened itself out in his mind something after

this fashion: When a wrong is done the innocent suffer along with the guilty; and the innocent also suffer in its undoing.

Shady Dale woke up the next morning to find the walls and the fences in all public places plastered with placards, or handbills, printed in red ink. The most prominent feature of the typography, however, was not its colour, but the image of a grinning skull and cross-bones. The handbill was in the nature of a proclamation. It was dated "Den No. Ten, Second Moon. Year 21,000 of the Dynasty." It read as follows:

"To all Lovers of Peace and Good Order—Greeting: Whereas, it has come to the knowledge of the Grand Cyclops that evil-minded white men, and deluded freedmen, are engaged in stirring up strife; and whereas it is known that corruption is conspiring with ignorance—

"Therefore, this is to warn all and singular the persons who have made or are now making incendiary propositions and threats, and all who are banded together in secret political associations to forthwith cease their activity. And let this warning be regarded as an order, the violation of which will be followed by vengeance swift and sure. The White Riders are abroad.

"Thrice endorsed by the Venerable, the Grand Cyclops, in behalf of the all-powerful Klan. (. (. (. K. K. K. .) .) .)"

Now, if this document had been in writing, it might have passed for a joke, but it was printed, and this fact, together with its grave and formal style, gave it the dignity and importance of a genuine proclamation from

a real but an unseen and unknown authority. It had the advantage of mystery, and there are few minds on which the mysterious fails to have a real influence. In addition to this, the spectacular performance at the Rev. Jeremiah's church the night before gave substance to the proclamation. That event was well calculated to awe the superstitious and frighten the timid.

The White Riders had disappeared as mysteriously as they came. Only one person was known to have seen them after they had left the church—it was several days before the Rev. Jeremiah could be induced to relate his experience—and that person was Mr. Sanders. What he claimed to have witnessed was even more alarming than the brief episode that occurred at the Rev. Jeremiah's church. Mr. Sanders was called on to repeat the story many times during the next few weeks, but it was observed by a few of the more thoughtful that he described what he had seen with greater freedom and vividness when there was a negro within hearing. His narrative was something like this:

"Gus Tidwell sent arter me to go look at his sick hoss, an' I went an' doctored him the best I know'd how, an' then started home ag'in. I had but one thought on my mind; Gus had offered to pay me for my trouble sech as it was, an' I was tryin' for to figger out in my mind what in the name of goodness had come over Gus. I come mighty nigh whirlin' roun' in my tracks, an' walkin' all the way back jest to see ef he didn't need a little physic. He was cold sober at the time, an' all of a sudden, when he seed that I had fetched his hoss

through a mighty bad case of the mollygrubs, he says to me, ' Mr. Sanders,' says he, ' you've saved me a mighty fine hoss, an' I want to pay you for it. You've had mighty hard work; what is it all wuth? ' ' Gus,' says I, ' jest gi' me a drink of cold water for to keep me from faintin', an' we'll say no more about it.'

" Well, I didn't turn back, though I was much of a mind to. I mosied along wondering what had come over Gus. I had got as fur on my way home as the big 'simmon tree—you-all know whar that is—when all of a sudden, I felt the wind a-risin'. It puffed in my face, an' felt warm, sorter like when the wind blows down the chimbley in the winter time. Then I heard a purrin' sound, an' I looked up, an' right at me was a gang of white hosses an' riders. They was right on me before I seed 'em, an' I couldn't 'a' got out'n the'r way ef I'd 'a' had the wings of a hummin'-bird. So I jest ketched my breath, an' bowed my head, an' tried to say, ' Now I lay me down to sleep.' I couldn't think of the rest, an' it wouldn't 'a' done no good nohow. I cast my eye aroun', findin' that I wasn't trompled, an' the whole caboodle was gone. I didn't feel nothin' but the wind they raised, as they went over me an' up into the elements. Did you ever pass along by a pastur' at night, an' hear a cow fetch a long sigh? Well, that's jest the kind of fuss they made as they passed out'n sight."

This story made a striking climax to the performances that the negroes themselves had witnessed, and for a time they were subdued in their demeanour. They even betrayed a tendency to renew their old familiar relations

with the whites. The situation was not without its pathetic side, and if Mr. Sanders professed to find it simply humourous, it was only because of the effort which men make—an effort that is only too successful—to hide the tenderer side of their natures. But the episode of the White Riders soon became a piece of history; the alarm that it had engendered grew cold; and Hotchkiss, aided by Bridalbin, who called himself Boring, soon had the breach between the two races wider than ever.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Gabriel at the Big Poplar

LATE one afternoon, at a date when the tension between the two races was at its worst, Gabriel chanced to be sitting under the great poplar which was for years, and no doubt is yet, one of the natural curiosities of Shady Dale, on account of its size and height. He had been reading, but the light had grown dim as the sun dipped behind the hills, and he now sat with his eyes closed. His seat at the foot of the tree was not far from the public highway, though that fact did not add to its attractions from Gabriel's point of view. He preferred the seat for sentimental reasons. He had played there when a little lad, and likewise Nan had played there; and they had both played there together. The old poplar was hollow, and on one side the bark and a part of the trunk had sloughed away. Here Gabriel and Nan had played housekeeping, many and many a day before the girl had grown tired of her dolls. The hollow formed a comfortable playhouse, and the youngsters, in addition to housekeeping, had enjoyed little make-believe parties and picnics there.

As Gabriel sat leaning against the old poplar, his back

to the road and his eyes closed, he heard the sound of men's voices. The conversation was evidently between country folk who had been spending a part of the day in town. Turning his head, Gabriel saw that there were three persons, one riding and two walking. Directly opposite the tree where Gabriel sat, they met an acquaintance who was apparently making a belated visit to town.

"Hello, boys!" said the belated one by way of salutation. "I 'low'd I'd find you in town, an' have company on my way home."

"What's the matter, Sam?" asked one of the others. "This ain't no time of day to be gwine away from home."

"Well, I'm jest obliged to git some ammunition," replied Sam. "I've been off to mill mighty nigh all day, an' this evenin', about four o'clock, whilst my wife was out in the yard, a big buck nigger stopped at the gate, an' looked at her. She took no notice of him one way or another, an' presently, he ups an' says, 'Hello, Sissy! can't you tell a feller howdy?'"

"*He did?*" cried the others. Gabriel could hear their gasps of astonishment and indignation from where he sat.

"He said them very words," replied Sam; "'Hello, Sissy! can't you tell a feller howdy?'"

"Did you leave anybody at home?" inquired one of the others.

"You bet your sweet life!" replied Sam in the slang of the day. "Johnny Bivins is there, an' he ain't no

slouch, Johnny ain't. I says to Molly, says I, 'Johnny will camp here till I can run to town, an' git me some powder an' buckshot.'"

"We have some," one of the others suggested.

"Better let 'im go on an' git it," said another; "we can't have too much in our neck of the woods when things look like they do now. We'll wait for you, Sam, if you'll hurry up."

"Good as wheat!" responded Sam, who went rapidly toward town.

"I tell you what, boys, we didn't make up our minds about this business a single minute too soon," remarked one of the three who were waiting for the return of their neighbour. "Somethin's got to be done, an' the sooner it's done, the sooner it'll be over with."

"You're talkin' now with both hands and tongue!" declared one of the others, in a tone of admiration.

"You'll see," remarked the one who had proposed to wait, "that Sam is jest as ripe as we are. We know what we know, an' Sam knows what he knows. I don't know as I blame the niggers much. Look at it from their side of the fence. They see these d——d white hellians goin' roun', snortin' an' preachin' ag'in the whites, an' they see us settin' down, hands folded and eyes shet, and they jest natchally think we're whipped and cowed. Can you blame 'em? I hate 'em all right enough, but I don't blame 'em."

Gabriel knew that the man who was speaking was George Rivers, a small farmer living a short distance in the country. His companions were Tom Alford and

Britt Hanson, and the man who had gone to town for the ammunition was Sam Hathaway.

"Are you right certain an' shore that this man Hotchkiss is stayin' wi' Mahlon Butts?" George Rivers inquired.

"He lopes out from there every mornin'," replied Tom Alford.

"Mahlon allers was the biggest skunk in the woods," remarked Hanson. "He's runnin' for ordinary. I happened to hear him talkin' to a lot of niggers t'other day, and I went up and cussed him out. I wanted the niggers to see how chicken-hearted he is. Well, sirs, he never turned a feather. I never seed a more lamblike man in my life. I started to spit in his face, and then I happened to think about his wife. Yes, sirs, it seemed to me for about the space of a second or two that I was lookin' right spang in Becky's big eyes, an' I couldn't 'a' said a word or done a thing to save my life. I jest whirled in my tracks and went on about my business. You-all know Becky Butts -well, there's a woman that comes mighty nigh bein' a saint. Why she married sech a rapscallion as Mahlon, I'll never tell you, an' I don't believe she knows herself. But she's all that's saved Mahlon."

"That's the Lord's truth," responded Tom Alford.

"Why, when he first j'ined the stinkin' radicals," continued Britt Hanson, "a passel of the boys, me among 'em, laid off to pay him a party call, an' string him up. Well, the very day we'd fixed on, here comes Becky over to my house; an' she fetched the baby, too. I knowed,

time I laid eyes on her, that she had done got wind of what we was up to. Says she to me, 'Britt, I hear it whispered around that you are fixin' up to do me next to the worst harm a man can do to a woman.' 'Why, Becky,' says I, 'I wouldn't harm you for the world, and I wouldn't let anybody else do it.' 'Oh, yes, you would, Britt,' says she. She laughed as she said it, but when I looked in her big eyes, I could see trouble and pain in 'em. I says to her, says I, 'What put that idee in your head, Becky?' And says she, 'No matter how it got there, Britt, so long as it's there. You're fixin' up to hurt me an' my baby.'

"Well, sirs, you can see where she had me. I says, says I, 'Becky, what's to hender you from takin' supper here to-night?' This kinder took her by surprise. She says, 'I'd like it the best in the world, Britt; but don't you think I'd better be at home—to-night?' 'No,' says I, 'a passel of the boys'll be here d'reckly after supper, and I reckon maybe they'd like to see you. You know yourself that they're all mighty fond of you, Becky,' says I. She sorter studied awhile, an' then she says, 'I'll tell you what I'll do, Britt—I'll come over after supper an' set awhile.' 'You ain't afeard to come?' says I. 'No, Britt,' says she; 'I ain't afeard of nothin' in this world except my friends.' She was laughin', but they ain't much diff'ence betwixt that kind of laughin' an' cryin'.

"About that time, mother come in. Says she, 'An' be shore an' fetch the baby, Becky.' The minnit mother said that, I know'd that she was the one that told Becky

what we had laid off to do. You-all know what happened after that."

"We do that away," said George Rivers. "When I walked in on you, and seen Becky an' the baby, I know'd purty well that the jig was up, but I thought I'd set it out and see what'd happen."

"I never seen a baby do like that'n done that night," remarked Tom Alford. "It laughed an' it crowed, an' helt out its han's to go to ever' blessed feller in the crowd; an' Becky looked like she was the happiest creetur in the world. I was the fust feller to cave, an' I didn't feel a bit sheepish about it, neither. I rose, I did, an' says, 'Well, boys, it's about my bedtime, an' I reckon I'll toddle along,' an' so I handed the baby to the next feller, an' mosied off home."

"You did," said Britt Hanson, "an' by the time the boys got through passin' the baby to the next feller, there wan't any feller left but me. An' then the funniest thing happened that you ever seed. You know how Becky was gwine on, laughin' an' talkin'. Well, the last man hadn't hardly shet the door behind him, when Becky flopped down and put her head in mother's lap, and cried like a baby. I'm mighty glad I ain't married," Britt Hanson went on. "There ain't a man in the world that knows a woman's mind. Why, Becky was runnin' on and laughin' jest like a gal at picnic up to the minnit the last man slammed the door, and then, down she went and began to boohoo. Now, what do you think of that?"

"I know one thing," remarked George Rivers—"the

meaner a man is, the quicker he gits the pick of the flock. The biggest fool in the world allers gits the best or the purtiest gal."

Then there was a pause, as if the men were listening. "Well," said Tom Alford, after awhile, "we ain't after the gals now. That Hotchkiss feller goes out to Mahlon's by fust one road and then the other. You know where Ike Varner lives; well, Ike's wife is a mighty good-lookin' yaller gal, an' when Hotchkiss knows that Ike ain't at home, he goes by that road. I got all that from a nigger that works for me. If Ike ain't at home, he goes in for a drink of water, an' then he tells the yaller gal how to convert Ike into bein' a radical—Ike, you know, don't flock with that crowd. That's what the gal tells my nigger. Well, I put a flea in Ike's ear t'other day, an' night before last, Ike comes to me to borry my pistol. You know that short, single-barrel shebang? Well, I loant it to him on the express understandin' that he wasn't to shoot any spring doves nor wild peafowls."

The men laughed, and then sat or stood silent, each occupied with his own reflections, until Sam Hathaway returned. Whereupon, they moved on, one of them singing, in a surprisingly sweet tenor, the ballad of "Nelly Gray."

It was now dark, and ordinarily, Gabriel would have gone to supper. But, instead of doing that, he went on toward town, and met Hotchkiss and Boring on the outskirts. They were engaged in a close discussion when Gabriel met them. It would have been a great deal bet-

ter for him and his friends if he had passed on without a word; but Gabriel was Gabriel, and he was compelled to act according to Gabriel's nature. So, without hesitation, he walked up to the two men.

"Is this Mr. Hotchkiss?" he inquired.

"That is my name," replied Hotchkiss in his smoothest tone.

"Are you going out to Butts's to-night?"

"Now, that is a queer question," remarked Hotchkiss, after a pause—"a very queer question. What is your name?"

"Tolliver—Gabriel Tolliver."

"Gabriel Tolliver—h'm—yes. Well, Mr. Tolliver, why are you so desirous of knowing whether I go to Butts's to-night?"

"Honestly," replied Gabriel, a little nettled at the man's airs, "I don't want to know at all. I simply wanted to advise you not to go there to-night."

"Oh, you wanted to *advise* me not to go. Now, then, let's go a little further into the matter. *Why* do you want to advise me?" Hotchkiss was a man who was not only ripe for a discussion at all times, and upon any subject, but made it a point to emphasise all the most trifling details. "Have you any special interest in my welfare?"

"I think not," replied Gabriel, bluntly. "I simply wanted to drop you a hint. You can take it or not, just as you choose." With that, he turned on his heel, and went home to supper, little dreaming that his kindness of heart, and his sincere efforts to do a stranger a favour

would involve him in a tangled web of circumstances, from which he would find it almost impossible to escape.

Gabriel heard Hotchkiss laugh, but he did not hear the remark that followed.

"Why, even the children and the young men think I am a coward. They have the idea that courage exists nowhere but among themselves. It is the most peculiar mental delusion I ever heard, and it persists in the face of facts. The probability is that the young man who has just delivered this awful warning has laid a wager with some of his companions that he can fill me full of fright and prevent my going to Butts's."

"Now, I don't think that," replied Boring, or Bridalbin. "I know these people to the core. I had their ideas and thought their thoughts until I found that sentiment doesn't pay. That young man has probably heard some threat made against you, and he thinks he is doing the chivalrous thing to give you a warning. Chivalry! Why, I reckon that word has done more harm to this section, first and last, than the war itself."

"Or, more probable still," suggested Hotchkiss, his voice as smooth and as flexible as a snake, "he was simply trying to find out whether I propose to go to Butts's to-night. If I had some one to keep an eye on him, we might be able to procure some important information, disclosing a conspiracy against the officers of the Government. A few arrests in this neighbourhood might have a wholesome and subduing effect."

"Don't you believe it," said Bridalbin. "I know these people a great deal better than you do."

"I know them a great deal better than I care to," remarked Hotchkiss drily. "I have not a doubt that this young Tolliver was one of that marauding band of conspirators that surrounded the church recently, and endeavoured to intimidate our coloured fellow-citizens. Nor do I doubt that these same conspirators will make an effort to frighten me. I have no doubt that they will make a strong effort to run me away. But they can't do it, my friend. I feel that I have a mission here, and here I propose to stay until there is no work for me to do."

"Well, I can keep an eye on Tolliver if you think it best," Bridalbin suggested somewhat doubtfully. "I know where he lives."

"Do that, Boring," exclaimed Hotchkiss with grateful enthusiasm. "Come to the lodge about nine or half-past, and report." The "lodge" was the new name for the old school-house, and in that direction Hotchkiss turned his steps.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Bridalbin Follows Gabriel

BORING, or Bridalbin—no one ever discovered why he changed his name, for he changed neither his nature nor his associations—followed along after Gabriel, and was in time to see him enter the door and close it behind him. The Lumsden Place was somewhat in the open, but the trees, where Bridalbin took up his position of watcher, made such dense and heavy shadows that it was almost impossible to distinguish objects more than a few feet away. In these heavy shadows Bridalbin stood while Gabriel was supposed to be eating his supper.

A dog trotting along the walk shied and growled when he saw the motionless figure, but after that, there was a long period of silence, which was finally broken by voices on a veranda not far away. The owners of the voices had evidently come out for a breath of fresh air, and were carrying on a conversation which had begun inside. Bridalbin could see neither the house nor the occupants of the veranda, but he could hear every word that was said. One of the voices was soft and clear, while the other was hard, almost harsh, yet it was the voice of a woman. If Bridalbin had been at all familiar with Shady Dale, he would have known that one

of the speakers was Madame Awtry and the other Miss Puella Gillum.

"It was only a few weeks ago that they told the poor child about her father," said Miss Puella. "Neighbour Tomlin couldn't muster up the courage to do it, and so it became Fanny's duty. I know it nearly broke her heart."

"Why did they tell her at all? Why did they think it was necessary?" inquired Madame Awtry. Her voice had in it the quality that attracts attention and compels obedience.

"Well, you know Margaret is of age now, and Neighbour Tomlin, who is made up of heart and conscience, felt that it would be wrong to keep her in ignorance, but he couldn't make up his mind to be the bearer of bad news; so it fell to Fanny's lot. But it seems that Margaret already knew, and on that occasion Fanny had to do all the crying that was done. Margaret had known it all along, and had only feigned ignorance in order not to worry her mother. 'I have known it from the first,' she said. 'Please don't tell Nan.' But Nan had known it all along, and Fanny told Margaret so. It is a pity about her father. If he was what he should be, he'd be very proud of Margaret."

"His name was Bridlebin, or something of that kind, was it not?" Madame Awtry asked.

"Something like that," replied Miss Puella. "The world is full of trouble," she said after awhile, and her voice was as gentle as the cooing of a dove—"so very full of trouble. I sometimes think that we should have

as much pity for those who are the cause of it as for those who are the victims." Alas! Miss Puella was thinking of Waldron Awtry, whose stormy spirit had passed away.

"That is the Christian spirit, certainly," said Waldron's mother, in her firm, clear tones. "Let those live up to it who can!"

"The girl is in good hands," remarked Miss Puella, after a pause, "and she should be happy. Neighbour Tomlin and Fanny fairly worship her."

"Yes, she's in good hands," responded Madame Awtry, "yet when she comes here, which she is kind enough to do sometimes, it seems to me that I can see trouble in her eyes. It is hard to describe, but it's such an expression as you or I would have if we were dependent, and something was wrong or going wrong with those on whom we depended. But it may be merely my imagination."

"It certainly must be," Miss Puella declared, "for there is nothing wrong or going wrong with Neighbour Tomlin and Fanny."

At this point the conversation ceased, and the two women sat silent, each occupied with her own thoughts. Miss Puella wondered that Madame Awtry could even imagine trouble at the Tomlin Place, while the Madame was smiling grimly to herself, and pitying Miss Puella because she could not perceive what the trouble really was. "What a world it is! what a world!" Madame Awtry said to herself with a sigh.

And Bridalbin stood wondering at the freak of chance

or circumstance that had enabled him to hear two persons unknown to him discussing the dependence of his daughter. "Dependent" was the word that grated on his ear. He never thought of Providence—how few of us do!—he never dreamed that his presence at that particular place at that particular moment was to be the means of providing a sure remedy for the most serious trouble, short of bereavement, that his daughter would ever be called on to face.

Bridalbin walked slowly in the direction of the Lumsden Place, which having fewer trees around it could be dimly seen in the starlight. Before he emerged from the denser shadows he heard the door open and close, and then Gabriel came down the steps whistling, and was soon in the thoroughfare. But, instead of going toward town, he turned and went toward the fields. Following the road for a hundred yards or more he soon came to the bars, which formed a sort of gateway to the rich pastures of Bermuda, and, vaulting lightly over these, he was soon lost to view, though the stars were shining as brightly as they could. He was making his way toward his favourite Bermuda hill.

Now, Bridalbin knew enough about the topography of Shady Dale to know that the path or roadway, leading from the bars across the Bermuda fields, was a short cut to one of the highways that led from town past the door of Mahlon Butts. He paused a moment, and then, more sedate than Gabriel, climbed the bars and followed the path across the field. He walked rapidly, for he was anxious to discover what course Gabriel had taken.

He crossed the fields and saw no one; he reached the highway, and followed it for a quarter of a mile or more, but he could see no sign of Gabriel.

And for a very good reason. That young man had followed the field-path only a short distance. He had turned sharply to the right, making for the Bermuda hill, where, with no fear of the dewy dampness to disturb him, he flung himself at full length on the velvety grass, and gulped down great draughts of the cool, sweet air. He heard the sound of Bridalbin's footsteps, as that worthy went rapidly along the path, and he had a boy's mischievous impulse to hail the passer-by. But he was so fond of the hill, and so jealous of his possession of the silence, the night, and the remote stars, that he suppressed the impulse, and Bridalbin went on his way, firm in the belief that Gabriel had crossed the field to the public highway, and was now going in the direction of Mahlon Butts's home. He believed it, and continued to believe it to his dying day, though the only evidence he had was the hint conveyed in the surmises of Hotchkiss.

Bridalbin finally abandoned his wild-goose chase, and returned to the neighbourhood of Gabriel's home, where he waited and watched until his engagement with Hotchkiss compelled him to abandon his post. The business of the Union League was not very pressing that night, or it had been dispatched with unusual celerity, for when Bridalbin reached the old school-house, the Rev. Jeremiah, who had taken upon himself the duties of janitor, was in the act of closing the doors.

"I been waitin' fer you, Mr. Borin'," said the Rev.

Jeremiah, after he had responded to Bridalbin's salutation. De Honerbul Mr. Hotchkiss tol' me ter tell you, in case I seed you, dat he gwine on home; an' he say p'intedly dat dey's no need fer ter worry 'bout him, kaze eve'ything's all right. Ez he gun it ter me, so I gin it ter you. You oughter been here ter-night. Me an' Mr. Hotchkiss took an' put all de business thoo 'fo' you kin bat yo' eye; yes, suh, we did fer a fack."

"I'm very sorry he didn't wait for me," said Bridalbin.

As for Gabriel, he lay out on the Bermuda hill, contemplating himself and the rest of the world. The stars rode overhead, all moving together like some vast fleet of far-off ships. In the northwest, while Gabriel was watching, a huge star seemed to break away from its companions and rush hurtling toward the west, leaving a trail of white vapour behind it. The illumination was but momentary. The Night was quick to snuff out all lights but its own. Whatever might be taking place on the other side of the world, Night had possession here, and proposed to maintain it as long as possible. A bird might scream when Brother Fox seized it; a mouse might squeak when Cousin Screech-Owl swooped down on noiseless wing and seized it; Uncle Wind might rustle the green grass in search of Brother Dust: nevertheless, the order of the hour was silence, and Night was prompt to enforce it.

It is a fine night, Gabriel thought—and the Silence might have answered, "Yes, a fine night and a fateful." It was a night that was to leave its mark on many lives.

At supper, Gabriel's grandmother had informed him that three of his friends had come by to invite him to accompany them to a country dance on the further side of Murder Creek—a dance following a neighbouring barbecue. These friends, his grandmother said, were Francis Bethune, Paul Tomlin, and Jesse Tidwell. They had searched the town over for Gabriel, and were disappointed at not finding him at home.

"Where do you hide yourself, Gabriel?" his grandmother had asked him. "And why do you hide? This is not the first time by a dozen that your friends have been unable to find you."

Gabriel shook his curly head and laughed. "Let me see, grandmother: directly after dinner, I said my Latin and Greek lessons to Mr. Clopton. Bethune was upstairs in his own room, for I heard him singing. After that, I went into the library, and read for an hour or more. Then I selected a book and went over the hill to the big poplar—you know where it is—and there I stayed until dark."

"It is all very well to read and study, Gabriel, and I am sure I am glad to know that you are doing both," said his grandmother, with a smile, "but you must remember that there are social obligations which cannot be ignored. You will have to go out into the world after awhile, and you should begin to get in the habit of it now. You should not avoid your friends. I don't mean, of course, that you should run after them, or fling yourself at their heads; I wouldn't have you do that for the world; but you shouldn't make a hermit of yourself.

To be popular, you should mix and mingle freely with your equals. I know how it was in my day. I was not fond of society myself, but my mother always insisted that I should sacrifice my own inclinations for the pleasure of others, and in this way earn the only kind of popularity that is really gratifying. And I really believe I was the most popular of all the girls." The dear old lady tossed her head triumphantly.

"That's what Mr. Clopton says," remarked Gabriel; "but you know, grandmother, your time was different from our time"—oh, these youngsters who persist in reminding us of our fogyism—"and you were a girl in those days, while I am a boy in these. I am lazy, I know; I can loaf with a book all day long; but for the life of me, I can't do as Bethune does. He doesn't read, and he doesn't study; he just dawdles around, and calls on the girls, and talks with them by the hour. He used to be in love with Nan (so Mr. Sanders says) and now he's in love with Margaret Bridalbin; he's just crazy about her. Now, I'm not in love with anybody"—"oh, Gabriel!" protested a still, small voice in his bosom—"and if I were, I wouldn't dawdle around, and whittle on drygoods boxes, and go and sit for hours at a time with Sally, and Susy, and Bessy, and Molly." Decidedly, Gabriel was coming out; here he was with strong views of his own.

His grandmother laughed aloud at this, saying, "You are very much like your grandfather, Gabriel. He was a very serious and masterful man. He detested small-talk and tittle-tattle, and I was the only girl he ever

went with. But Francis Bethune is very foolish not to stick to Nan; she is such a delightful girl. It would be very unfortunate indeed if those two were not to marry."

If the dear old lady had not been so loyal to her sex, she would have told Gabriel that Nan had visited her that very day, and had asked a thousand and one questions about her old-time comrade. Indeed, Nan, with that delightful spirit of unconventionality that became her so well, had made bold to rummage through Gabriel's books and papers. She found one sheet on which he had evidently begun a letter. It started out well, and then stopped suddenly: "Dear Nan: I hardly know——" Then the attempt was abandoned in despair, and on the lower part of the sheet was scrawled: "Dearest Nan: I hardly know, in fact I don't know, and you'll never know till Gabriel blows his horn." This sheet the fair forager promptly appropriated, saying to herself "Boys are such funny creatures."

The conversation between Gabriel and his grandmother, as has been said, took place while they were eating their supper. The youngster was not sorry that he was absent when his friends called for him. It was a long ride to the Samples plantation, where the dance was to be, and a long, long ride back home, when the fiddles were in their bags, the dancers fagged out, and the fun and excitement all over and done with. The Bermuda hill was good enough for Gabriel, unless he could arrange his own dances, and have one partner—just one —from early candle-light till the grey dawn of morning.

It was late when Gabriel returned from the Bermuda

hill, later than he thought, for he had completely lost himself in the solemn imaginings that overtake and overwhelm a young man who is just waking up to the serious side of existence, and on whose mind are beginning to dawn the possibilities and responsibilities of manhood. Ah, these young men! How lovable they are when they are true to themselves—when they try boldly to live up to their own ideals!

Once in his room, Gabriel looked about for the book he had been reading during the afternoon. It was his habit to read a quarter of an hour at least—sometimes longer—before going to bed. But the book was not to be found. This was surprising until he remembered that he had not entered his bed-room since the dinner-hour; and then it suddenly dawned on his mind that he had left the book at the foot of the big poplar.

Well! that was a pretty come-off for a young man who was inclined to be proud of his careful and systematic methods. And the book was a borrowed one, and very valuable—one of the early editions of Franklin's autobiography, bound in leather. What would Meriwether Clopton think, if, through Gabriel's carelessness, the dampness and the dew had injured the volume, which, after Horace and Virgil, was one of Mr. Clopton's favourites?

There was but one thing to be done, and that Gabriel was prompt to do. He went softly downstairs, so as not to disturb his grandmother, and made his way to the big poplar, where he was fortunate enough to find the book. Thanks to the sheltering arms of the tree, and

the leaf-covered ground, the volume had sustained no damage.

As Gabriel recovered the book, and while he was examining it, he heard a chorus of whistlers coming along the road. Mingled with the whistling chorus were the various sounds made by a waggon drawn by horses. Gabriel judged that the waggon contained the young men who had been to the dance at the Samples plantation, and in this his judgment turned out to be correct. The young men were in a double-seated spring waggon, drawn by two horses. They drew up in response to Gabriel's holla, and he climbed into the waggon.

"Well, what in the name of the seven stars are you doing out here in the woods at this time of night?" cried Jesse Tidwell, and he laughed with humourous scorn when Gabriel told him.

"But the book belongs to Bethune's grandfather," explained Gabriel. "It might have been ruined by rain, or by the damp night-air, if left out until morning. If it had been my own book, perhaps I'd have trusted to luck."

"You missed it to-night, Tolliver," said Francis Bethune. "Feel Samples"—his name was Felix—"was considerably put out because you didn't come. And the girls—Tolliver, when did you get acquainted with them? They all know you. Nelly Kendrick tossed her head and turned up her nose, and said that a dance wasn't a dance unless Mr. Tolliver was present. Tidwell, who was the red-headed girl that raved so about Tolliver's curls?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Jesse Tidwell, "that was Amy Rowland. If she wasn't the belle of the ball, I'll never want any more money in this world. It's no use for Gabriel to blow his horn, when he has all the girls in that part of the country to blow it for him. My son, when and where did you come to know all these young ladies?"

"Why, I used to go out there to church with Mr. Sanders, and sometimes with Mrs. Absalom. There are some fine people in that settlement."

"Fine!" exclaimed Jesse Tidwell, with real enthusiasm; "why, split silk is as coarse as gunny-bagging by the side of those girls. I told 'em I was coming back. 'You must!' they declared, 'and be sure and bring Mr. Tolliver!'" Young Tidwell mimicked a girl's voice with such ridiculous completeness that his companions shouted with laughter. "There's another thing you missed, Tolliver," he went on. "Feel Samples has a cow that gives apple-brandy, and old Burrel Bohannon, the one-legged fiddler, must have milked her dry, for along about half-past ten he kind of rolled his eyes, and fetched a gasp, and wobbled out of his chair, and lay on the floor just as if he was stone dead."

In a short time the young men had reached the tavern, where the team and vehicle belonged. As they drew up in front of the door, Jesse Tidwell, continuing and completing his description of the condition of Burrel Bohannon, exclaimed: "Yes, sir, he fell and lay there. He may have kicked a time or two, and I think he mumbled something, but he was as good as dead."

Bridalbin, restless and uneasy, had been wandering about the town, and he came up just in time to hear this last remark. At that moment, a negro issued from the tavern with a lantern, and Bridalbin was not at all surprised to see Gabriel Tolliver with the rest; and he wondered what mischief the young men had been engaged in. Some one had been badly hurt or killed. That much he could gather from Tidwell's declaration; but who?

He went to his lodging and to bed in a very uncomfortable frame of mind.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Fate of Mr. Hotchkiss

MR. HOTCHKISS, after leaving the Union League, had decided not to wait for his co-worker, whom he knew as Boring. So far as he was concerned, he had no fears. He knew, of course, that he was playing with fire, but what of that? He had the Government behind him, and he had two companies of troops within call. What more could any man ask? More than that, he was doing what he conceived to be his duty. He belonged to that large and pestiferous tribe of reformers, who go through the world without fixed principles. He had been an abolitionist, but he was not of the Garrison type. On the contrary, he thought that Garrison was a time-server and a laggard who needed to be spurred and driven. He was one of the men who urged John Brown to stir up an insurrection in which innocent women and children would have been the chief sufferers; and he would have rejoiced sincerely if John Brown had been successful. He mistook his opinions for first principles, and went on the theory that what he thought right could not by any possibility be wrong. He belonged to the Peace Society, and yet nothing would have pleased him

better than an uprising of the blacks, followed by the shedding of innocent blood.

In short, there were never two sides to any question that interested Hotchkiss. He held the Southern people responsible for American slavery, and would have refused to listen to any statement of facts calculated to upset his belief. He was narrow-minded, bigoted, and intensely in earnest. Some writer, Newman, perhaps, has said that a man will not become a martyr for the sake of an opinion; but Newman probably never came in contact with the whipper-snappers of Exeter Hall, or their prototypes in this country—the men who believe that philanthropy, and reform, and progress generally are worthless unless it be accompanied by strife, and hate, and, if possible, by bloodshed. You find the type everywhere; it clings like a leech to the skirts of every great movement. The Hotchkisses swarm wherever there is an opening for them, and they always present the same general aspect. They are as productive of isms as a fly is of maggots, and they live and die in the belief that they are promoting the progress of the world; but if their success is to be measured by their operations in the South during the reconstruction period, the world would be much better off without them. They succeeded in dedicating millions of human beings to misery and injustice, and warped the minds of the whites to such an extent that they thought it necessary to bring about peace and good order by means of various acute forms of injustice and lawlessness.

Mr. Hotchkiss was absolutely sincere in believing that

the generation of Southern whites who were his contemporaries were personally responsible for slavery in this country, and for all the wrongs that he supposed had been the result of that institution. He felt it in every fibre of his cultivated but narrow mind, and he went about elated at the idea that he was able to contribute his mite of information to the negroes, and breed in their minds hatred of the people among whom they were compelled to live. If there had been a Booker Washington in that day, he would have been denounced by the Hotchkisses as a traitor to his race, and an enemy of the Government, just as they denounced and despised such negroes as Uncle Plato.

Hotchkiss went along the road in high spirits. He had delivered a blistering address to the negroes at the meeting of the league, and he was feeling happy. His work, he thought, was succeeding. Before he delivered his address, he had initiated Ike Varner, who was by all odds the most notorious negro in all that region. Ike was a poet in his way; if he had lived a few centuries earlier, he would have been called a minstrel. He could stand up before a crowd of white men, and spin out rhymes by the yard, embodying in this form of biography the weak points of every citizen. Some of his rhymes were very apt, and there are men living to-day who can repeat some of the extemporaneous satires composed by this negro. He had the reputation among the blacks of being an uncompromising friend of the whites. In the town, he was a privileged character; he could do and say what he pleased. He was a fine cook, and pro-

vided possum suppers for those who sat up late at night, and ice-cream for those who went to bed early. He tidied up the rooms of the young bachelors, he sold chicken-pies and ginger-cakes on public days, and Cephas, whose name was mentioned at the beginning of this chronicle, is willing to pay five dollars to the man or woman who can bake a ginger-cake that will taste as well as those that Ike Varner made. He was a happy-go-lucky negro, and spent his money as fast as he made it, not on himself, but on Edie, his wife, who was young, and bright, and handsome. She was almost white, and her face reminded you somehow of the old paintings of the Magdalene, with her large eyes and the melancholy droop of her mouth. Edie was the one creature in the world that Ike really cared for, and he had sense enough to know that she cared for him only when he could supply her with money. Yet he watched her like a hawk, madly jealous of every glance she gave another man; and she gave many, in all directions. Ike's jealousy was the talk of the town among the male population, and was the subject for many a jest at his expense. His nature was such that he could jest about it too, but far below the jests, as any one could see, there was desperation.

In spite of all this, Ike was the most popular negro in the town. His wit and his good-humour commended him to the whole community. He had moved his wife and his belongings into the country, two or three miles from town, on the ground that the country is more conducive to health. Ike's white friends laughed at him, but the negro couldn't see the joke. Why should a

negro be laughed at for taking precautions of this sort, when there is a whole nation of whites that keeps its women hid, or compels them to cover their faces when they go out for a breath of fresh air? The fact is that Ike didn't know what else to do, and so he sent his handsome wife into exile, and went along to keep her company. Nevertheless, all his interests were within the corporate limits of Shady Dale, and he was compelled by circumstances to leave Edie to pine alone, sometimes till late at night. Whether Edie pined or not, or whether she was lonely, is a question that this chronicler is not called on to discuss.

Now, the fact of Ike's popularity with the whites had struck Mr. Hotchkiss as a very unfavourable sign, and he set himself to work to bring about a change. He sent some of the negro leaders to talk with Ike, who sent them about their business in short order. Then Mr. Hotchkiss took the case in hand, and called on Ike at his house. The two had an argument over the matter, Ike interspersing his remarks with random rhymes which Hotchkiss thought very coarse and crude. At the conclusion of the argument, Hotchkiss saw that the negro had been laughing at him all the way through, and he resented this attitude more than another would. He went away in a huff, resolved to leave the negro with his idols.

This would have been very well, if the matter had stopped there, but Edie put her finger in the pie. One day when Ike was away, she called to Hotchkiss as he was passing on his way to town, and invited him into the house. There was something about the man that had

attracted the wild and untamed passions of the woman. He was not a very handsome man, but his refinement of manner and speech stood for something, and Edie had resolved to cultivate his acquaintance. He went in, in response to her invitation, and found that she desired to ask his advice as to the best and easiest method of converting Ike into a Union Leaguer. Hotchkiss gave her such advice as he could in the most matter-of-fact way, and went on about his business. Otherwise he paid no more attention to her than if she had been a sign in front of a cigar-store. Edie was not accustomed to this sort of thing, and it puzzled her. She went to her looking-glass and studied her features, thinking that perhaps something was wrong. But her beauty had not even begun to fade. A melancholy tenderness shone in her lustrous eyes, her rosy lips curved archly, and the glow of the peach-bloom was in her cheeks.

"I didn't know the man was a preacher," she said, laughing at herself in the glass.

Time and again she called Mr. Hotchkiss in as he went by, and on some occasions they held long consultations at the little gate in front of her door. Ike was not at all blind to these things; if he had been, there was more than one friendly white man to call his attention to them. The negro was compelled to measure Hotchkiss by the standard of the most of the white men he knew. He was well aware of Edie's purposes, and he judged that Hotchkiss would presently find them agreeable.

Ike listened to Edie's arguments in behalf of the Union League with a great deal of patience. Prompted

by Hotchkiss, she urged that membership in that body would give him an opportunity to serve his race politically; he might be able to go to the legislature, and, in that event, Edie could go to Atlanta with him, where (she said to herself) she would be able to cut a considerable shine. Moreover, membership in the league, with his aptitude for making a speech, would give him standing among the negro leaders all over the State.

Ike argued a little, but not much, considering his feelings. He pointed out that all his customers, the people who ate his cakes and his cream, and so forth and so on, were white, and felt strongly about the situation. Should they cease their patronage, what would he and Edie do for victuals to eat and clothes to wear?

"Oh, we'll git along somehow; don't you fret about that," said Edie with a toss of her head.

"Maybe you will, but not me," replied Ike.

At last, however, he had consented to join the league, and appeared to be very enthusiastic over the matter. As Mr. Hotchkiss went along home that night—the night on which the young men had gone to the country dance—he was feeling quite exultant over Ike's conversion, and the enthusiasm he had displayed over the proceedings. After he had decided to go home rather than wait for Bridalbin, he hunted about in the crowd for Ike, but the negro was not to be found. As their roads lay in the same direction Hotchkiss would have been glad of the negro's company along the way, and he was somewhat disappointed when he was told that Ike had started for home as soon as the meeting adjourned. Mr. Hotch-

kiss thereupon took the road and went on his way, walking a little more rapidly than usual, in the hope of overtaking Ike. At last, however, he came to the conclusion that the negro had remained in town. He was sorry, for there was nothing he liked better than to drop gall and venom into the mind of a fairly intelligent negro.

As for Ike, he had his own plans.. He had told Edie that in all probability he wouldn't come home that night, and advised her to get a nearby negro woman to stay all night with her. This Edie promised to do. When the league adjourned, Ike lost no time in taking to the road, and for fear some one might overtake him he went in a dog-trot for the first mile, and walked rapidly the rest of the way. Before he came to the house, he stopped and pulled off his shoes, hiding them in a fence-corner. He then left the road, and slipped through the woods until he was close to the rear of the house. Here his wariness was redoubled. He wormed himself along like a snake, and crept and crawled, until he was close enough to see Edie sitting on the front step—there was but one —of their little cabin. He was close enough to see that she had on her Sunday clothes, and he thought he could smell the faint odour of cologne; he had brought her a bottle home the night before.

He lay concealed for some time, but finally he heard footsteps on the road, and he rose warily to a standing position. Edie heard the footsteps too, for she rose and shook out her pink frock, and went to the gate. The lonely pedestrian came leisurely along the road, having no need for haste. When he found that it was impos-

sible to overtake Ike, Mr. Hotchkiss ceased to walk rapidly, and regulated his pace by the serenity of the hour and the deliberate movements of nature. The hour was rapidly approaching when solitude would be at its meridian on this side of the world, and a mocking-bird not far away was singing it in.

Mr. Hotchkiss would have passed Ike's gate without turning his head, but he heard a voice softly call his name. He paused, and looked around, and at the gate he saw the figure of Edie. "Is that you, Mr. Hotchkiss? What you do with Ike?"

"Isn't he at home? He started before I did."

"He ain't comin' home to-night, an' I was so lonesome that I had to set on the step here to keep myse'f company," said Edie. "Won't you come in an' rest? I know you must be tired; I got some cold water in here, fresh from the well."

"No, I'll not stop," replied Mr. Hotchkiss. "It is late, and I must be up early in the morning."

"Well, tell me 'bout Ike," said Edie. "You got 'im in the league all right, I hope?" She came out of the gate, as she said this, and moved nearer to Hotchkiss. In her hand she held a flower of some kind, and with this she toyed in a shamefaced sort of way.

"Mr. Varner is now a member in good standing," replied Hotchkiss, "and I think he will do good work for his race and for the party."

Edie moved a step or two nearer to him, toying with her flower. Now, Mr. Hotchkiss was a genuine reformer of the most approved type, and, as such, he was entitled

to as many personal and private fads as he chose to have. He was a vegetarian, holding to the theory that meat is a poison, though he was not averse to pie for breakfast. His pet aversion, leaving alcohol out of the question, was all forms of commercial perfumes. As Edie came close to him, he caught a whiff of her cologne-scented clothes, and his anger rose.

"Why will you ladies," he said, "persist in putting that sort of stuff on you?"

"I dunner what you mean," replied Edie, edging still closer to Hotchkiss.

"Why that infernal——"

He never finished the sentence. A pistol-shot rang out, and Hotchkiss fell like a log. Edie, fearing a similar fate for herself, ran screaming down the road, and never paused until she had reached the dwelling of Mahlon Butts. She fell in the door when it was opened and lay on the floor, moaning and groaning. When she could be persuaded to talk, her voice could have been heard a mile.

"They've killt him!" she screamed; "they've killt him! an' he was sech a good man! Oh, he was sech a good man!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Mr. Sanders Searches for Evidence

THE news of the shooting of Hotchkiss spread like wildfire, and startled the community, giving rise to various emotions. It created consternation among the negroes, who ran to and fro, and hither and yonder, like wild creatures. Many of the whites, especially the thoughtless and the irresponsible, contemplated the tragedy with a certain degree of satisfaction, feeling that a very dangerous man had been providentially removed. On the other hand, the older and more conservative citizens deplored it, knowing well that it would involve the whole community in trouble, and give it a conspicuous place in the annals which radical rage was daily preparing, in order still further to inflame the public mind of the North.

Bridalbin promptly disappeared from Shady Dale, but returned in a few days, accompanied by a squad of soldiers. It was the opinion of the community, when these fresh troops made their appearance, that they were to be added to the detachment stationed in the town; but this proved to be a mistake. Two nights after their arrival, when the officer in charge, who was a member of the military commander's staff, had investigated the

killing, he gave orders for the arrest of Gabriel Tolliver, Francis Bethune, Paul Tomlin, and Jesse Tidwell. The arrests were made at night, and so quietly that when the town awoke to the facts, and was ready to display its rage at such a high-handed proceeding, the soldiers and their prisoners were well on their way to Malvern.

The people felt that something must be done, but what? One by one the citizens instinctively assembled at the court-house. No call was issued; the meeting was not preconcerted; there was no common understanding; but all felt that there must be a conference, a consultation, and there was no place more convenient than the old court-house, where for long years justice had been simply and honestly administered.

It was, indeed, a trying hour. Meriwether Clopton and his daughter Sarah were the first to make their appearance at the court-house, and it was perhaps owing to their initiative that a large part of the community shortly assembled there. At first, there was some talk of a rescue, and this would have been feasible, no doubt; but while Lawyer Tidwell was violently advocating this course, Mr. Sanders mounted the judge's bench, and rapped loudly for order. When this had been secured, he moved that Meriwether Clopton be called to the chair. The motion had as many seconds as there were men in the room, for the son of the First Settler was as well-beloved and as influential as his father had been.

"My friends," he said, after thanking the meeting for the honour conferred upon him, "I feel as if we were all in the midst of a dream, and therefore I am at a loss

what to say to you. As it is all very real, and far removed from the regions of dreams, the best that I can do is to counsel moderation and calmness. The blow that has fallen on a few of us strikes at all, for what has happened to some of our young men may easily happen to the rest, especially if we meet this usurpation of civil justice with measures that are violent and retaliatory. We can only hope that the Hand that has led us into the sea of troubles by which we have been overwhelmed of late will lead us safely out again. For myself, I am fully persuaded that what now seems to be a calamity will, in some shape or other, make us all stronger and better. I am an old man, and this has been my experience. You need have no fears for the welfare of the young men. They may be deprived for a time of the comforts to which they are accustomed, but their safety is assured. They will probably be tried before a military court, but if there is a spark of justice in such a tribunal, our young men will shortly be restored to us. We all know that these lads never dreamed of assassination, and this is what the killing of this unfortunate man amounts to. We have met here to-day, not to discuss measures of vengeance and retaliation, but to consult together as to the best means of securing evidence of the innocence of the young men. Speaking for myself, I think it would be well to place the whole matter in the hands of Mr. Sanders, leaving him to act as he thinks best."

This was agreed to by the meeting, more than one of the audience declaring loudly that Mr. Sanders was the

very man for the occasion. By unanimous agreement it was decided that one of the most distinguished lawyers in the State should be retained to defend the young men and that he should be authorised to employ such assistant counsel as he might deem necessary.

It was the personality of Meriwether Clopton, rather than his remarks, that soothed and subdued the crowd which had assembled at the court-house. He was serenity itself; his attitude breathed hope and courage; and in the tones of his voice, in his very gestures, there was a certainty that the young men would not be made the victims of political necessity. In his own mind, however, he was not at all sure that the radical leaders at Washington would not be driven by their outrageous rancour to do the worst that could be done.

As may be supposed, Mr. Sanders did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. He was the first to leave the court-room, but he was followed and overtaken by Silas Tomlin.

"Be jigged, Silas, ef you don't look like you've seed a ghost!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders, whose good-humour had been restored by the prospect of prompt action.

"Worse than that, Sanders; Paul has been carried off. If you'll fetch him back, you may show me an army of ghosts. But I wanted to see you, Sanders, about this business. You'll need money, and if you can't get it anywhere else, come to me; I'll take it as a favour."

Mr. Sanders frowned and pursed his lips as if he were about to whistle. "You mean, Silas, that if I need

money, and can't beg, nor borry, nor steal it, maybe you'll loan me a handful of shinplasters. Why, man, I wouldn't give you the wroppin's of my little finger for all the money you eber seed or saved. Do you think that I'm tryin' to make money?"

"But there'll be expenses, William, and money's none too plentiful among our people." Silas spoke in a pleading tone, and his lips were trembling from grief or excitement.

Noticing this, Mr. Sanders relented a little in his attitude toward the man. "Well, Silas, when I reely need money, I'll call on you. But don't lose any sleep on account of that promise, for it'll be many a long day before I call on you."

With that, Mr. Sanders mounted his horse—known far and wide as the Racking Roan—and was soon out of sight. His destination was the residence of Mahlon Butts, and in no long time his horse had covered the distance.

Although the murder of Hotchkiss was more than a week old, a considerable number of negroes were lounging about the premises of Judge Butts—he had once been a Justice of the Peace—and in the road near by, drawn to the spot by that curious fascination which murder or death exerts on the ignorant. They moved about with something like awe, talking in low tones or in whispers. Mr. Sanders tied his horse to a swinging limb and went in. He was met at the door by Mahlon himself.

"Why, come in, William; come in an' make yourself

welcome. You uv heard of the trouble, I make no doubt, or you wouldn't be here. It's turrible, William, turrible, for a man to be overcome in this off-hand way, wi' no time for to say his pra's or even so much as to be sorry for his misdeeds."

Judge Butts's dignity was of the heavy and oppressive kind. His enunciation was slow and deliberate, and he had a way of looking over his spectacles, and nodding his head to give emphasis to his words. This dignity, which was fortified in ignorance, had received a considerable reinforcement from the fact that he was a candidate for a county office on the Republican ticket.

Before Mr. Sanders could make any reply to Mahlon's opening remark, Mrs. Becky Butts came into the room. She was not in a very good humour, and, at first, she failed to see Mr. Sanders.

"Mahlon, if you don't go and run that gang of niggers off, I'll take the shot-gun to 'em. They've been hanging around—why, howdye, Mr. Sanders? I certainly am glad to see you. I hope you'll stay to dinner; it looks like old times to see you in the house."

There was something about Mrs. Becky Butts that was eminently satisfying to the eye. She was younger than her husband, who, at fifty, appeared to be an old man. Her sympathies were so keen and persistent that they played boldly in her face, running about over her features as the sunshine ripples on a pond of clear water.

"Set down, Becky," said Mr. Sanders, after he had

responded to her salutation. "I've come to find out about the killing of that feller Hotchkiss."

"You may well call it killin', William, bekaze Friend Hotchkiss was stone dead a few hours arter the fatal shot was fired," declared Judge Butts.

"Where was the killin' done?" inquired Mr. Sanders. He addressed himself to Mrs. Butts, but Mahlon made reply.

"We found him, William, right spang in front of Ike Varner's cabin—right thar, an' nowhar else. He war doin' his level best for to git on his feet, an' he tried to talk, but not more than two or three words did he say."

"Well, what did he say?" inquired Mr. Sanders.

"It was the same thing ever' time—'Why, Tolliver, Tolliver'—them was his very words."

"Are you right certain about that, Mahlon?" asked Mr. Sanders.

"As certain an' shore, William, as I am that I'm settin' here. Ef he said it once, he said it a dozen times."

"I reckon maybe he had been talking with young Tolliver before he came from town," remarked Mrs. Butts, noting Mr. Sanders's serious countenance.

"Whar was he wounded, Becky?" asked Mr. Sanders.

"Between the left ear and the temple."

"Becky's right, William," was the solemn comment of Mahlon. "Yes, sir, he was hit betwixt the year an' the temple."

"Did you have a doctor?"

"We sent for one, but if he come, we never saw him," Mrs. Butts replied.

"Would you uv believed it, William? An' yit it's the plain truth," said Mahlon.

"What time was Hotchkiss killed?"

"'Bout half-past ten; maybe a little sooner."

This was all the information Mr. Sanders could get, and it was a great deal more than he wanted in one particular. He knew that Gabriel Tolliver was innocent of the killing; but the fact that his name was called by the dying man was almost as damaging as an ante-mortem accusation would have been.

Mr. Sanders rode to Ike Varner's cabin, a few hundred yards away. Tying his horse to the fence on the opposite side of the road, he entered the house without ceremony.

"Who is that? La! Mr. Sanders, you sho did skeer me," exclaimed Edie. "Why, when did you come? I would as soon have spected to see a ghost!"

"You'll see 'em here before you're much older," replied Mr. Sanders, grimly. "They ain't fur off. Wher's Ike?"

"La! ef you know anything about Ike you know more than I does. I ain't laid eyes on that nigger man, not sence——" She paused, and looked at Mr. Sanders with a smile.

"Not sence the night Hotchkiss was killed," said Mr. Sanders, completing her sentence for her.

"La, Mr. Sanders! how'd you know that? But it's the truth: I ain't never seen Ike sence that night."

"I know a heap more'n you think I do," Mr. Sanders remarked. "Hotchkiss was talkin' to you at the gate thar when he was shot. What was he sayin'?"

The woman was a bright mulatto, and, remembering her own designs and desires so far as Hotchkiss was concerned, her face flushed and she turned her eyes away. "Why, he wan't sayin' a word, hardly; I was doin' all the talkin'. I was settin' on the step there, an' I seen him passin', an' hollad at him. I ast him if he wouldn't have a drink of cold water, an' he said he would, an' I took it out to the gate, an' while I was talkin', they shot him. They certainly did."

"Did you ask Ike about it?" Mr. Sanders inquired.

"La! I ain't seen Ike sence that night," exclaimed Edie, flirting her apron with a coquettish air that was by no means unbecoming.

"Now, Edie," said Mr. Sanders, with a frown to match the severity of his voice, "you know as well as I do, that when you heard the pistol go off, and saw what had happened, you run in the house an' flung your apern over your head." It was a wild guess, but it was close to the truth.

"La, Mr. Sanders! you talk like you was watchin' me. 'Twa'n't my apern, 'twas my han's. I didn't have on no apern that night; I had on my Sunday frock."

"An' you know jest as well as I do that Ike come in here an' stood over you, an' said somethin' to you."

"No, sir; he didn't stand over me; I was here"—she illustrated his position by her movements—"an' when Ike come in, he stood over there."

"What did he say?"

"He said," replied Edie, smiling to show her pretty teeth, 'If you want him, go out there an' git him.' Yes, sir, he said that. La! I never heard of a nigger killin' a white man on *that* account; did you, Mr. Sanders?"

"I don't know as I ever did," replied Mr. Sanders, regarding her with an expression akin to pity. "But times has changed."

"They certainly has," said Edie. "I tell you what, Mr. Sanders, I don't b'live Mr. Hotchkiss was a man." She looked up at Mr. Sanders, as she made the remark. Catching his eye, she exclaimed—"I don't; I declare I don't! I never will believe it." She gave a chirruping laugh, as she made the remark.

It is to be doubted if, in the history of the world, a man ever had a higher compliment paid to his devotion and his singleness of purpose.

As Mr. Sanders mounted his horse, Edie watched him, and, as she stood with her arms extended, each hand grasping a side of the doorway, smiling and showing her white teeth, she presented a picture of wild and irresponsible beauty that an artist would have admired. Finally, she turned away with a laugh, saying, "I declare that Mr. Sanders is a sight!"

In due time the Racking Roan carried Mr. Sanders across Murder Creek to the plantation of Felix Samples, where the news of the arrest of the young men occasioned both grief and indignation. They had arrived at the dance about nine o'clock, and had started home between eleven and twelve. Gabriel, Mr. Samples said,

was not one of the party. Indeed, he remembered very well that when some of the young people asked for Gabriel, Francis Bethune had said that the town had been searched for Gabriel, and he was not to be found.

Evidently, there was no case against the three young men who had gone to the dance. They could prove an alibi by fifty persons. "Be jigged ef I don't b'lieve Gabriel is in for it," said Mr. Sanders to himself as he was going back to Shady Dale. "An' that's what comes of moonin' aroun' an' loafin' about in the woods wi' the wild creeturs."

Mr. Sanders went straight to the Lumsden Place to consult with Gabriel's grandmother. Meriwether Clopton and Miss Fanny Tomlin were already there, each having called for the purpose of offering her such comfort and consolation as they could. This fine old gentlewoman had had the care of Gabriel almost from the time he was born, for his birth left his mother an invalid, the victim of one of those mysterious complaints that sometimes seize on motherhood. It was well known in that community, whose members knew whatever was to be known about one another, that Lucy Lumsden's mind and heart were wholly centred on Gabriel and his affairs. She was a frail, delicate woman, gentle in all her ways, and ever ready to efface herself, as it were, and give precedence to others. Her manners were so fine that they seemed to cling to her as the perfume clings to the rose.

So these old friends—Meriwether Clopton, and Miss Fanny Tomlin—considered it to be their duty, as it was

their pleasure, to call on Lucy Lumsden in her trouble. They expected to find her in a state of collapse, but they found her walking about the house, apparently as calm as a June morning.

"Good-morning, Meriwether," she said pleasantly; "it is a treat indeed, and a rare one, to see you in this house. And here is Fanny! I am glad to see you, my dear. It is very good of you to come to an old woman who is in trouble. I think we are all in trouble together. No, don't sit here, my dear; the library is cooler, and you must be warm. Come into the library, Meriwether."

"Upon my word, you look twenty years younger," said Miss Fanny Tomlin.

"Do I, indeed? Then trouble must be good for me. Still, I don't appreciate it. I am an old woman, my dear, and all the years of my life I have had a contempt for those who fly into a rage, or lose their tempers. And now, look at me! Never in all your days have you seen a woman in such a rage as I have felt all day and still feel!"

"The idea!" exclaimed Miss Fanny. "Why, you look as cool as a cucumber."

"Yes, the idea!" echoed Mrs. Lumsden. "If I had those miserable creatures in my power, do you know what I would do? Do you know, Meriwether?"

"I can't imagine, Lucy," he replied gently. He saw that the apparent calmness of Gabriel's grandmother was simply the result of suppressed excitement.

"Well, I'll not tell you if you don't know." She seated herself, but rose immediately, and went to the

window, where she stood looking out, and tapping gently on the pane with her fingers. She stood there only a short time. "You may imagine that I am nervous," she said, turning away from the window, "but I am not." She held out her hand to illustrate. It was frail, but firm. "No," she went on, "I am not nervous; I am simply furious. I know what you came for, my friends, and it is very kind of you; but it is useless. I love you both well, and I know what you would say. I have said such things to my friends, and thought I was performing a duty."

"Well, you know the old saying, Lucy," said Meriwether Clopton. "Misery loves company. We are all in the same boat, and it seems to be a leaky one. I have heard it said that a woman's wit is sometimes better than a man's wisdom, and, for my part, I have not come to see if you needed to be consoled, but to find out your views."

"I have none," she said somewhat curtly. "Show me a piece of blue cloth, and I'll tear it to pieces. That is the only thought or idea I have."

"Well, that doesn't help us much," Meriwether Clopton remarked.

At that moment, Mr. Sanders was announced, and word was sent to him to come right in. "Howdy, everybody," he said in his informal way, as he entered the room. He was warm, and instead of leaving his hat on the hall-rack, he had kept it in his hand, and was using it as a fan. "Miss Lucy," he said, "I won't take up two minutes of your time——"

"Mr. Sanders, you may take up two hours of my time. Time!" Mrs. Lumsden exclaimed bitterly—"why, time is about all I have left."

"Oh, it ain't nigh as bad as you think," remarked Mr. Sanders, as cheerfully as he could. "But I want to settle a p'int or two. Do you remember what time it was when Gabriel come home the night Hotchkiss was killed?"

Mrs. Lumsden reflected a moment. "Why, he went out directly after supper, and came in—well, I don't remember when he came in. I must have been asleep."

"Um-m," grunted Mr. Sanders.

"Is it important?" Mrs. Lumsden asked.

"It may turn out to be right down important," replied Mr. Sanders, and then he said no more, but sat looking at the floor, and wondering how Gabriel could be released from the tangled web that the spider, Circumstance, had woven about him.

As Mr. Sanders went out, he met Nan at the door, and he was amazed at the change that had come over her. Perplexity and trouble looked forth from her eyes, and there was that in her face that Mr. Sanders had never seen there before. "Why, honey!" he exclaimed, "you look like you've lost your best friend."

"Well, perhaps I have. Who is in there?" And when Mr. Sanders told her, she cried out, "Oh, why don't they leave her alone?"

"Well, they ain't pesterin' her much, honey. Go right in. Lucy Lumsden has got as much grit as a major gener'l, an' she'll be glad to see you."

But Nan stood staring at Mr. Sanders, as if she wanted to ask him a question, and couldn't find words for it. Her face was pale, and she had the appearance of one who is utterly forspent.

"Why, honey, what ails you? I never seed you lookin' like this before."

"You've never seen me ill before," answered Nan. "I thought the walk would do me good, but the sun—oh, Mr. Sanders! please don't ask me anything else."

With that, she ran up the steps very rapidly for an ill person, and stood a moment in the hallway.

"Be jigged ef she ain't wuss hit than any on us!" declared Mr. Sanders, to himself, as he turned away. "What a pity that she had to go an' git grown!"

Following the sound of voices, Nan went into the library. Mrs. Lumsden, who was still walking about restlessly, paused and tried to smile when she saw Nan; but it was only a make-believe smile. Nan went directly to her, and stood looking in the old gentlewoman's eyes. Then she kissed her quite suddenly and impulsively.

"Nan, you must be ill," Miss Fanny Tomlin declared.

"I am, Aunt Fanny; I am not feeling well at all."

"Lie there on the sofa, child," Mrs. Lumsden insisted. Taking Nan by the arm, she almost forced her to lie down.

"If you-all are talking secrets, I'll go away," said Nan.

"No, child," remarked Mrs. Lumsden; "we are talking about trouble, and trouble is too common to be much of a secret in this world." She seated herself on the

edge of the sofa, and held Nan's hand, caressing it softly.

"This is the way I used to cure Gabriel, when he was ill or weary," she said in a tone too low for the others to hear.

"Did you?" whispered Nan, closing her eyes with a sigh of satisfaction.

"This is the second time I have been able to sit down since breakfast," remarked Mrs. Lumsden.

"I have walked miles and miles," replied Nan, wearily.

There was a noise in the hall, and presently Tasma Tid peeped cautiously into the room. "Wey you done wit Honey Nan?" she asked. "She in dis house; you ain' kin fool we."

"Come in, and behave yourself if you know how," said Mrs. Lumsden. "Come in, Tid."

"How come we name Tid? How come we ain't name Tasma Tid?"

No one thought it worth while to make any reply to this, and the African came into the room, acting as if she were afraid some one would jump at her. "Sit in the corner there at the foot of the sofa," said Mrs. Lumsden. Tasma Tid complied very readily with this command, since it enabled her to be near Nan. The African squatted on the floor, and sat there motionless.

Meriwether Clopton and Miss Fanny went away after awhile, but Mrs. Lumsden continued to sit by Nan, caressing her hand. Not a word was said for a long time, but the silence was finally broken by Nan, who spoke to the African.

"Tasma Tid, I want you to go home and tell Miss Johnny that I will spend the rest of the day and the night with Grandmother Lumsden."

"Don't keer; we comin' back," said Tasma Tid.

"Yes, come back," said Mrs. Lumsden; whereupon, the African whisked out of the room as quick as a flash.

After Tasma Tid had gone, a silence fell on the house —a silence so profound that Nan could hear the great clock ticking in the front hall, and the bookshelves cracked just as they do in the middle of the night.

"If I had known what was going to happen when Gabriel came and kissed me good-bye," said Mrs. Lumsden, after awhile, "I would have gone out there where those men were, and—well, I don't know what I wouldn't have done!"

"Didn't Gabriel tell you? Why——" Nan paused.

"Not he! Not Gabriel!" cried Mrs. Lumsden in a voice full of pride. "He wanted to spare his grandmother one night's worry, and he did."

"Didn't you know when he kissed you good-night that something was wrong?" Nan inquired.

"How should I? Why, he sometimes comes and kisses me in the middle of the night, even after he has gone to bed. He says he sleeps better afterwards."

What was there in this simple statement to cause Nan to catch her breath, and seize the hand that was caressing her. For one thing, it presented the tender side of Gabriel's nature in a new light; and for the rest—well, who shall pretend to fathom a young woman's heart?

"Yes, he was always doing something of that kind,"

remarked the grandmother proudly; "and I have often thought that he should have been a girl."

"A girl!" cried Nan.

"Yes; he will marry some woman who doesn't appreciate his finer qualities—the tenderness and affection that he tries to hide from everybody but his grandmother; and he will go about with a hungry heart, and his wife will never suspect it. I am afraid I dislike her already."

"Oh, don't say that!" Nan implored.

"But if he was a girl," the grandmother went on, "he would be better prepared to endure coldness and neglect. This is partly what we were born for, my dear, as you will find out one day for yourself."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Captain Falconer Makes Suggestions

IT was not often that Mr. Sanders had a surprise, but he found one awaiting him when he left the Lumsden Place, and started in the direction of home. He had not taken twenty steps before he met the young Captain who had charge of the detachment of Federal troops stationed at Shady Dale.

"This is Mr. Sanders, I believe," he said without ceremony. "My name is Falconer. I have just been to call on Mr. Clopton, but they tell me there that he is at Mrs. Lumsden's."

"Well, I wouldn't advise you to go there," said Mr. Sanders, bluntly. "The lady is in a considerbul state of mind about her gran'son."

"It is a miserable piece of business all the way through," remarked Captain Falconer. There was a note of sympathy in his voice, which Mr. Sanders could not fail to catch, and it interested him.

"I called upon my cousin, Mrs. Claiborne, for the first time to-day," the Captain went on. "She has invited me to tea often, but I have refused the invitation on account of the state of feeling here. I know how high it is. It is natural, of course, but it is not justifi-

able. Take my case, for instance: I am a Democrat, and I come from a family of Democrats, who have never voted anything else but the Democratic ticket, except when Henry Clay was a candidate, and when Lincoln was running for a second term."

"You don't tell me!" cried Mr. Sanders, with genuine astonishment.

"It is a fact," said Captain Falconer, with emphasis. "If you think that I, or any of the men under me, or any of the men who fought at all, intended to bring about such a condition as now exists in this part of the country, you are doing us a great wrong. Don't mistake me! I am not apologising for the part I took. I would do it all over again a hundred times if necessary. Yet I do not believe in negro suffrage, and I abhor and detest every exaction that the politicians in Washington have placed upon the people of the South."

Mr. Sanders was too much astonished to make appropriate comment. He could only stare at the young man. And Captain Falconer was very good to look upon. He was of the Kentucky type, tall, broad-shouldered and handsome. His undress uniform became him well, and he had the distinctive and pleasing marks that West Point leaves on all young men who graduate at the academy there.

"Well, as I told you, I called on my cousin to-day for the first time, and after we had talked of various matters, especially the unfortunate events that have recently occurred, she insisted that I make it my business to see you or Mr. Clopton. She told me," the Captain

said, with a pleasant smile, "that you are the man that kidnapped Mr. Lincoln."

"She's wrong about that," replied Mr. Sanders; "I'm the man that didn't kidnap him. But I want to ask you: ain't you some kin to John Barbour Falconer?"

"He was my father," the Captain replied.

"Well, I've heard Meriwether Clopton talk about him hundreds of times. They ripped around in Congress together before the war."

"Now, that is very interesting to me," said the Captain, his face brightening.

He was silent for some time, as they walked slowly along, and during this period of silence, Meriwether Clopton came up behind them. He would have passed on, with a polite inclination of his head, but Mr. Sanders drew his attention.

"Mr. Clopton," he said, "here's a gentleman I reckon you'd like to know—Captain Falconer. He's a son of John Barbour Falconer."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Meriwether Clopton, a wonderful change passing over his face. "Well, I am glad to see a son of my dear old friend, anywhere and at any time." He shook hands very cordially with the Captain. "Let me see—let me see: if I am not mistaken, your first name is Garnett; you were named after your maternal grandfather."

"That is true, sir," replied the Captain, with a boyish laugh that was pleasing to the ear—he was not more than thirty. "But I am surprised that you should remember these things so well."

"Why, my dear sir, it is not surprising at all. I have dandled you on my knee many and many a time; I know the very house, yes, the very room, in which you were born. Some of the happiest hours of my manhood were spent with your father and mother in Washington. Your father is dead, I believe. Well, he was a good man; among the best I ever knew. What of your mother?"

"She has broken greatly," responded the Captain. "The war was a great burden to her. She was a Virginian, you know."

"Yes—yes!" said Meriwether Clopton. "The war has been a dreadful nightmare to the people on both sides; and it seems to be still going on disguised as politics. Only last night, as you perhaps know, a posse of soldiers arrested and carried off four of our worthiest young men."

"Yes, sir, I know of it and regret it," responded Captain Falconer. "And I have no doubt that a majority of the people here are incensed at the soldiers, forgetting that they are the mere instruments of their superiors, and that their superiors themselves take their orders from other superiors who are engaged in the game of politics. It is the duty of a soldier to blindly obey orders. To pause to ask a question would be charged to a spirit of insubordination. The army is at the beck and call of what is called the Government, and to-day the Government happens to be the radical contingent of the Republican Party. A soldier may detest the service he is called on to perform, but he is bound to obey orders.

I can answer for the officer who was sent to arrest these young men. He was boiling over with rage because he had been sent here on such an errand."

"I am glad to hear that," declared Meriwether Clopton, with great heartiness.

"His feelings were perfectly natural, sir," said Captain Falconer. "Take the army as it stands to-day, and it would be hard, if not impossible, to find a man in it who does not shrink from doing the dirty work of the politicians. Can you imagine that my mission here is pleasant to me? I can assure you, sir, it is the most disagreeable duty that ever fell to my lot. I am glad you spoke of these arrests. At your convenience, I should like to have a little conversation with you and Mr. Sanders on this subject."

"There is no time like the present," replied Meriwether Clopton. "Will you come with me to my house?"

"Certainly, sir; and with the more pleasure because I called on my cousin Mrs. Claiborne to-day. I have forborne to call on her heretofore on account of the prejudice against us. But these arrests made it necessary for me to communicate with some of the influential friends of the young men. I was afraid my visit to-day would prove to be embarrassing to her. If I visit you at your invitation, the probability is she will have no social penalty to pay. I know what the feeling is."

Indeed, he knew too well. He had passed along the streets apparently perfectly oblivious to the attitude and movements of those whom he chanced to meet, but all his

faculties had been awake, for he was a man of the keenest sensibilities. He had seen women and young girls curl their lips in a sneer, and toss their heads in scorn, as he passed them by; and some of them pulled their skirts aside, lest his touch should pollute them. He had observed all this, and he was wounded by it; and yet he had no resentment. Being a Southerner himself, he knew that the feelings which prompted such actions were perfectly natural, the fitting accompaniment of the humiliation which the radical element compelled the whites to endure.

In the course of his long and frequent walks in the countryside, Captain Falconer had made the acquaintance of Gabriel Tolliver, in whose nature the spirit of a gypsy vagrant seemed to have full sway; and Gabriel was the only person native to Shady Dale, except the ancient postmaster, with whom the young officer had held communication. He seemed to be cut off not only from all social intercourse, but even from acquaintanceship.

"You may rest assured," declared Meriwether Clopton, "that if I had known you were the son of my old friend, I would have sought you out, much as I detest the motives and purposes of those who have inaugurated this era of bayonet rule. And you may be sure, too, that in my house you will be a welcome guest."

"I appreciate your kindness, sir, and I shall remember it," said Captain Falconer.

That portion of Shady Dale which was moving about the streets with its eyes open was surprised and shocked —nay, wellnigh paralysed—to see the "Yankee Cap-

tain" on parade, as it were, with Meriwether Clopton on one side of him, and Mr. Sanders on the other. Yes, and the hand of the son of the First Settler (could their eyes deceive them?) was resting familiarly on the shoulder of the "Yankee!" Surely, here was food for thought. Were Meriwether Clopton and Mr. Sanders about to join the radicals? Well, well, well! At last one of the loungers, a man of middle age, who had seen service, raised his voice and put an end to comment.

"You can bet your sweet life," he declared, "that Billy Sanders knows what he's up to. He may not git the game he's after, but he'll fetch back a handful of feathers or hair. Mr. Clopton I don't know so well, but I was in the war wi' Billy Sanders, and I wish you'd wake me up and let me know when somebody fools him. There ain't a living man on the continent, nor under it neither, that can git on his blind side."

"Now you are whistlin'!" exclaimed one of his companions, and this seemed to settle the matter. If Mr. Sanders didn't know what he was about, why, then, everybody else in that neighbourhood might as well give up, "and let natur' cut her caper."

"I understand now why Mrs. Claiborne referred me to you," said Captain Falconer, when Mr. Sanders had related the nature and extent of the information which he had been able to gather during the morning.

"The lady is kinder partial," remarked Mr. Sanders, "but she's as bright as a new dollar, somethin' I ain't seed sence I cut my wisdom teeth."

"You already know what I intended to tell you," said

the Captain. But it turned out, nevertheless, that he was able to give them some very startling information. It was the general understanding in Shady Dale that the prisoners were to be sent to Atlanta; but the military authorities, fearing an attempt at rescue, perhaps, had ordered them to be sent to Fort Pulaski, below Savannah. There were other reasons, the Captain explained, for sending the young men there. They would be isolated from their friends, and, so placed, might be induced to confess; and if the circumstances surrounding them were not sufficient to produce such a result then other measures were to be taken.

Meanwhile, the circumstantial evidence against Gabriel was very strong—stronger even than Mr. Sanders had imagined. Bridalbin, whom Captain Falconer knew as Boring, had informed that officer of his own supposed discoveries with respect to Gabriel's movements; and the evidence he was prepared to give, coupled with the fact that Hotchkiss had pronounced the lad's name with his last breath, made out a case of exceptional strength. Urged on by the vindictiveness of the radical leaders in Congress, it was more than probable that the military court before which the young men were to be tried, would convict any or all of them on much slighter evidence than that which had accumulated against Gabriel. It was all circumstantial evidence of course, but even in the civil courts, and before juries made up of their peers, men accused of crime have frequently been convicted on circumstantial evidence alone—that is to say, on probability.

"Now, this is what I wanted to say," remarked Captain Falconer, as they sat in the library at the Clopton Place, and after he had gone over the evidence, item by item: "I was given to understand by the officer who made the arrests that I would shortly be transferred to Savannah, or, rather, to Fort Pulaski, and placed in charge of the prisoners, the idea being that I, knowing something of the young men, would be able to extract a confession from them by fair means. This failing, there are others who could be depended on to employ foul. The officer, who is a very fine soldier, and thoroughly in love with his profession, dropped a hint that, all other means failing, the young men are to be put through a course of sprouts in order to extort a confession."

Mr. Sanders looked hard at the Captain; he was taking the young man's measure. What he saw or divined must have been satisfactory, for his face, which had been in a somewhat puckered condition, as he himself would have expressed it, suddenly cleared up, and he rose from his chair with a laugh.

"Do you-all know what I've gone an' done?" he asked.

"You do so many clever things, William, that we cannot possibly imagine what the newest is," said Meriwether Clopton.

"Well, sir, this is the cleverest yit. I've come off from Lucy Lumsden's an' clean forgot my hoss. It's a wonder I didn't forgit my head. Now, you might 'a' said, an' said truly, that I'd forgit a man, or a 'oman,

but when William H. Sanders, Esquire, walks off in the broad light of day, an' forgits his hoss, an' that hoss the Rackin' Roan, you may know that his thinkin' machine has slipped a cog. Ef you'll excuse me, I'll go right arter that creetur. I'm mighty glad he can't talk —it's about the only thing he can't do—bekaze he'd gi' me a long an' warm piece of his mind."

Captain Falconer rose also, but Meriwether Clopton protested. "I should be glad if you would stay to dinner," he said. "I have several things to show you—some interesting letters from your father, for instance."

"But the ladies?" suggested the Captain, with a comically doubtful lift of the eyebrows. He had no notion of bearding any of the Confederate lionesses in their dens. "You know how they regard us here."

"Only my daughter Sarah is here. She knew your father well, and has a very lively remembrance of him. She was fifteen when you were three, and many a day she was your volunteer nurse."

So it was arranged that the Captain should remain to dinner, and it may be said that he spent a very pleasant time, after his long period of social isolation. "I shall call you Garnett, to begin with," said Sarah Clopton, as she shook his hand, "but you must not expect me to be very cordial to-day. It was only last night, you must remember, that some of the people you associate with arrested and carried off a young man who is very dear to me."

"You may be very sure, Miss Clopton, that the officer who did that piece of work had no relish for it. He

simply obeyed orders. He had no discretion in the matter whatever."

"Well, I shall be very glad to think that, Garnett, for your sake. But that fact doesn't restore our young men," she said with a sigh. "Oh, I wonder when we'll all be at peace and happy again?"

"In God's own time, and not before," declared Meriwether Clopton solemnly.

"Well, we'll try an' help that time to come," said Mr. Sanders, entering the room at that moment. He was followed by Cephas, who was one of Gabriel's favourites among the small boys. Cephas was bashful enough, but he always felt at ease at the Clopton Place, where everything moved along the lines of simplicity and perfect openness. The small boy had a sort of chilly feeling when he saw the officer, but he soon got over that.

"I went an' got my hoss," said Mr. Sanders, "an' he paid me back for my forgitfulness by purty nigh bitin' a piece out'n my arm; an' whilst I was a-rubbin' the place, up comes Cephas for to find out somethin' about the boys. When I got through makin' a few remarks sech as you don't hear at church, a kinder blind idee popped in my head, an' so I tuck Cephas up behind me, an' fetched him here."

"Sit on the sofa, Cephas. Have a chair, William, and tell us about your blind idea."

"Ef you'll promise not to laugh," Mr. Sanders stipulated. "You know Mrs. Ab's sayin' that ef the old sow knowed she was swallerin' a tree ev'ry time she crunched an acorn, she'd grunt a heap louder'n she does: well, I

know what I'm fixin' for to swaller, and you won't hear much loud gruntin' from me."

"Well, we are ready to hear from you," said Meriwether Clopton. Whereupon, Mr. Sanders threw his head back and laughed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Mr. Sanders's Riddle

"I TELL you how it is," said Mr. Sanders: "The riddle is how to git a message to Gabriel; I could git the Captain thar to take it, but the Captain will have as much as he can attend to, an' for that matter, so have I. Wi' this riddle I'm overcrapped. Sence I left here, I've gone over the whole matter in my mind, ef you can call it a mind. I could go down thar myself, an' I'd be glad to, but could I git to have a private talk wi' Gabriel? I reckon not."

The remark was really interrogative, and was addressed to Captain Falconer, who made a prompt reply —"I hardly think the scheme would work. My impression is that orders have been issued from Atlanta for these young men to be isolated. If that is so they can hold communication with no one but the sentinel on duty, or the officer who has charge of them. They are to be treated as felons, though nothing has been proved against them. I am not sure, but I think that is the programme."

"That is about what I thought," said Mr. Sanders, "an' that's what I told Cephas here. When I was fetchin' my horse, Cephas, he comes up, an' he says,

'Mr. Sanders, have you heard from Gabriel?' an' I says, 'No, Cephas, we ain't had time for to git a word from 'em.' An' then he went on to say, Cephas did, that he'd like mighty well to see Gabriel. I told him that maybe we could fix it up so as he could see Gabriel. You can't imagine how holp up the little chap was. To see him then, an' see him now, you'd think it was another boy."

Captain Falconer looked at Cephas, and could see no guile. On the contrary, he saw a freckled lad who appeared to be about ten years old; he was really nearly fourteen. Cephas was so ugly that he was ugly when he laughed, as he was doing now; but there was something about him that attracted the attention of those who were older. It was a fact much talked about that this freckled little boy never went with children of his own age, but was always to be found with those much older. He was Gabriel's chum when Gabriel wanted a chum; he went hunting with Francis Bethune; and he could often be found at the store in which Paul Tomlin was the chief clerk. He knew all the secrets of these young men, and kept them, and they frequently advised with him about the young ladies.

But he was fonder of Gabriel than of all the rest, and he was also fond of Nan, who had been kind to him in many ways. Cephas was one of those ill-favoured little creatures, who astonish everybody by never forgetting a favour. Gratitude ran riot in his small bosom, and he was ever ready to sacrifice himself for his friends.

Seeing that Captain Falconer continued to look at

him, Cephas hung his head. He was only too conscious of his ugliness, and was very sensitive about it. He wanted to be large and strong and handsome like Gabriel, or dark and romantic-looking like Francis Bethune; and sometimes he was very miserable because of the unkindness of fate or Providence in this matter.

"And so you want to see your friends," said the Captain, very kindly. Every feature of his face showed that his sympathies were keen. "They are very far away, or will be when they get to their journey's end—too far, I should think, for a little boy to travel."

"Maybe so," said Cephas, "but Gabriel had to go."

"I see," said the Captain; "wherever Gabriel goes, you are willing to go?"

"Yes, sir," replied Cephas very simply.

"I hope Gabriel appreciates it," remarked Sarah Clopton.

"Oh, he does!" exclaimed Cephas. "Gabriel knows. Why, one day——" Then, remembering the company he was in, he blushed, and refused to go on with what he intended to say.

Seeing his embarrassment, Mr. Sanders came to his rescue. "What I want to know, Captain, is this: if that little chap comes down to Savannah, will you allow him to see Gabriel and talk to him?"

Again the Captain looked at the boy, and Cephas, catching a certain humourous gleam in the gentleman's eye, began to smile. "Now, then," said Captain Falconer, with an answering smile, "how would you like to go with me?"

"I think I would like it," replied Cephas, with a broad grin; "I think that would be fine."

"And what does Mr. Sanders think of it?" the Captain asked.

"Well, I hadn't looked at it from that p'int of view," said Mr. Sanders. "I 'lowed maybe that the best an' cheapest plan would be for me to take the little chap down an' fetch him back."

"My opinion may not be worth much, Mr. Sanders," said Sarah Clopton, "but I think it would be a shame to take that child so far away from home. I don't believe his mother will allow him to go."

"That is a matter that was jest fixin' for to worry me," remarked Mr. Sanders. "I could feel it kinder fermentin' in my mind, like molasses turnin' to vinegar, an' now that you've fetched it to the top, Sarah, we'll settle it before we go any furder. Come, Cephas; we'll go an' see your mammy, an' see ef we can't coax her into lettin' you go. You'll have to do your best, my son; I'll coax, an' you must wheedle."

As they went out, Cephas was laughing at Mr. Sanders's remark about wheedling. The youngster was an expert in that business. He was his mother's only child, and he had learned at a very early age just how to manage her.

"What troubles me, Cephas," said Mr. Sanders, "is how you can git a message to Gabriel wi'out lettin' the cat out'n the bag. He'll be surrounder'd in sech a way that you can't git a word wi' 'im wi'out tellin' the whole caboodle."

At that moment, Mr. Sanders heard a small voice cry out something like this: "Phazasee! Phazasee! arawa ooya ingagog?"

To which jabbering Cephas made prompt reply: "Iya ingagog ota annysavvy ota eesa gibbleable!"

"Ooya ibfa! Ooya ibfa!" jeered the small voice.

Mr. Sanders looked at Cephas in astonishment. "What kinder lingo is that?" he asked.

"It's the way we school-children talk when we don't want anybody to know what we are saying. Johnny asked me where I was going, and I told him I was going to Savannah to see Gabriel."

"Did he know what you said?"

"Why, he couldn't help but know, but he didn't believe it; he said it was a fib."

"Well, I'll be jigged!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders. "Call that boy over here."

Cephas turned around—they had passed the house where the little boy lived—and called out: "Onnaja! Onnaja! Stermera Andersa antwasa ota eesa ooya."

The small boy came running, though there was a doubtful look on his face. He had frequently been the victim of Cephas's practical jokes.

Mr. Sanders questioned him closely, and he confirmed the interpretation of the lingo which Cephas had given to Mr. Sanders.

"Do you mean to tell me," said Mr. Sanders to Cephas when they had dismissed the small boy, "that this kinder thing has been goin' on right under my nose, an' I not knowin' a word about it? How'd you pick up the lingo?"

"Gabriel teached it to me," replied Cephas. "He talks it better than any of the boys, and I come next." This last remark Cephas made with a blush.

"Do I look pale, my son?" inquired Mr. Sanders, mopping his red face with his handkerchief. Cephas gave a negative reply by shaking his head. "Well, I may not look pale, but I shorely feel pale. You'll have to loan me your arm, Cephas; I feel like Christopher Columbus did when he discovered Atlanta, Ga."

"Why, he didn't discover Atlanta, Mr. Sanders," protested Cephas.

"He didn't!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders. "Well, it was his own fault ef he didn't. All he had to do was to read the country newspapers. But that's neither here nor thar. Here I've been buttin' my head ag'in trees, an' walkin' in my sleep tryin' for to study up some plan to git word to Gabriel, an' here you walk along the street an' make me a present of the very thing I want, an' I ain't even thanked you for it."

Cephas couldn't guess what Mr. Sanders was driving at, and he asked no questions. His mind was too full of his proposed trip. When the proposition was first broached to Cephas's mother, she scouted the idea of allowing her boy to make the journey. He was all she had, and should anything happen to him—well, the world wouldn't be the same world to her. And it was so far away; why, she had heard some one say that Savannah was right on the brink of the ocean—that great monster that swallowed ships and men by the thousand, and was just as hungry afterward as before. But

Cephas began to cry, saying that he wanted to see Gabriel; and Mr. Sanders told Gabriel's side of the story. Between the two, the poor woman had no option but to say that she'd consider the matter, and when a woman begins to consider—well, according to the ancient philosophers, it's the same as saying yes.

The truth is, a great deal of pressure was brought to bear on Cephas's mother, in one way and another. Meriwether Clopton called on her, bringing Captain Falconer. She was not at all pleased to see the Captain, and she made no effort to conceal her prejudice. "I never did think that I'd speak to a man in that uniform," she said with a very red face. But she was better satisfied when Meriwether Clopton told her that the Captain was the son of his dearest friend, and that he was utterly opposed to the radical policy.

The upshot of the matter was that, with many a sigh and some tears, she gave her consent for her onliest, her dearest, and her bestest, to go on the long journey. And then, after consenting, she was angry with herself because she had consented. In short, she was as miserable and as anxious as mother-love can make a woman, and poor Cephas never could understand until he became a grown man, and had children of his own, how his mother could make such a to-do over the opportunity that Providence had thrown in his way. To tell the truth, he was almost irritated at the obstacles and objections that the vivid imagination of his mother kept conjuring up. She said he must be sure not to fall in the ocean, and he must keep out of the way of the railroad trains.

She cried silently all the time she was packing his modest supply of clothes in a valise, and put some tea-cakes in one corner, and a little Testament in the other.

It is no wonder that children who do not understand such feelings should be impatient of them, and Cephas is to be excused if he watched the whole proceeding with something like contempt for woman's weakness. But he has bitterly regretted, oh, tens of thousands of times, that, instead of standing aloof from his mother's feelings, he did not throw his arms around her, and tell how much he appreciated her love, and how every tear she shed for him was worth to him a hundred times more than a diamond. But Cephas was a boy, and, being a boy, he could not rise superior to his boy's nature.

It was arranged that Cephas was to go to Savannah with Captain Falconer, and return with Mr. Sanders, who would take advantage of the occasion to settle up some old business with the firm that had acted as factor for Meriwether Clopton before the war. The arrangement took place when Mr. Sanders returned home after his visit to Cephas's mother, and was of course conditional on her consent, which was not obtained at once.

Mr. Sanders was shrewd enough not to dwell too much on the plight of the young men on his return. By some method of his own, he seemed to sweep the whole matter from his mind, and both he and Meriwether Clopton addressed themselves to such topics as they imagined the Federal Captain would find interesting; and in this they were seconded by Sarah Clopton, whom Robert Toombs declared to be one of the finest conversationalists of her

time when she chose to exert her powers. But for the softness and fine harmony of her features, her face would have been called masculine. Her countenance was entirely responsive to her emotions, and it was delightful to watch the eloquent play of her features. Captain Falconer fell quickly under the spell of her conversation, for one of its chiefest charms was the ease with which she brought out the best thoughts of his mind—thoughts and views that were a part of his inner self.

It was the same at dinner, where, without monopolising the talk, she led it this way and that, but always in channels that were congenial and pleasing to the Captain, and that enabled him to appear at his best. In honour of his guest, Meriwether Clopton brought out some fine old claret that had lain for many years undisturbed in the cellar.

"Thank you, Sarah," said Mr. Sanders, when the hostess pressed him to have a glass, "I'll not trouble you for any to-day. I've made the acquaintance of that claret. It ain't sour enough for vinegar, nor strong enough for liquor; it's a kind of a cross betwixt a second drawin' of tea an' the syrup of squills; an' no matter how hard you hit it it'll never hit you back. It's lots too mild for a Son of Temp'rance like me. No; gi' me a full jug an' a shuck-pen to crawl into, an' you may have all the wine, red or yaller."

But the fine old claret was thoroughly enjoyed by those who could appreciate the flower of its age and the flavour of its vintage; and when dinner was over, and Captain Falconer was on his way to camp, he felt that,

outside of his own home, he had never had such a pleasant experience.

In the course of a few days orders came from Atlanta for Captain Falconer to turn over the command of the detachment to the officer next in rank, and proceed to Malvern, where he would find further instructions awaiting him. When the time came for Cephas to be off with the Captain, you may well believe that his mother saw all sorts of trouble ahead for him. She had dreamed some very queer dreams, she said, and she was very sure that no good would follow. And at the last moment, she would have taken Cephas from the barouche which had come for him, if the driver, following the instructions of Mr. Sanders, had not whipped up his horses, and left the lady standing in the street.

As for Cephas, he found that parting from his mother was not such a fine thing after all. He watched her through a mist of tears, and waved his handkerchief as long as he could see her; and then after that he was the loneliest little fellow you have ever seen. He refused to eat the extra tea-cake that his mother had put in the pocket of his jacket, and made up his mind to be perfectly miserable until he got back home. But, after all, boys are boys, and the feeling of loneliness and dejection wore away after awhile, and before he had gone many miles, what with making the acquaintance of the driver, who was a private soldier, and getting on friendly terms with Captain Falconer, he soon arrived at the point where he relished his tea-cake, and when this had been devoured, he felt as if travelling was the most delightful

thing in the world, especially if a fellow has been intrusted with a tremendous secret that nobody else in the world knew besides Mr. Sanders and himself.

For as soon as Mr. Sanders discovered that the Captain would be willing to have Cephas go along, he had taken the little chap in hand, and thoroughly impressed upon his mind everything he wanted him to say to Gabriel, and he was not satisfied until Cephas had written the message out in the dog-latin of the school-children, and had learned it by heart. Mr. Sanders also impressed on the little lad's mind the probability that the Captain would be curious as to the nature of the message; and he gave Cephas a plausible answer for every question that an inquisitive person could put to him, and made him repeat these answers over and over again. In fact, Cephas was compelled to study as hard as if he had been in school, but he relished the part he was to play, and learned it with a zest that was very pleasing to Mr. Sanders. Only an hour before he was to leave with the Captain, Mr. Sanders went to Cephas's home, and made him repeat over everything he had been taught, and the glibness with which the little lad repeated the answers to the questions was something wonderful in so small a chap.

"Don't git lonesome, Cephas," was the parting injunction of Mr. Sanders. "Don't forgit that I'll be on the train when the whistle blows. I'm gwine to start right off. You may not see me, but I'll not be far off. Keep a stiff upper lip, an' don't git into no panic. The whole thing is gwine through like it was on skids, an' the skids greased."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Cephas Has His Troubles

USUALLY there is a yawning gulf between youth and old age; but in the case of Mrs. Lumsden and Nan Dorrington, it was spanned by the simplicity and tenderness common to both. Whether any of the ancients or moderns have mentioned the fact, it is hardly worth while to inquire, but good-humour is a form of tenderness. Those who are easy to laugh are likewise ready to be sorry, and they have a fund of sympathy to draw on whenever the necessity arises. Simplicity and tenderness connect the highest wisdom with the deepest ignorance, and find the elements of brotherhood where the intellect is unable to discern it. It was simplicity and tenderness that bridged the gulf of years that lay between the old gentlewoman and the young girl. Age can find no comfort for itself unless it can make terms with youth. Where it stands alone, depending upon the respect that should belong to what is venerable, there is something gruesome about it. It quenches the high spirits of children and young people, and chills their enthusiasm. All that it does for them is to give notorious advertisement to the complexion to which they must all come at last. "You see these

wrinkled and flabby features, this gray hair, these faded and watery eyes, these shaking limbs and trembling hands: well, this is what you must come to." And, indeed, it is an object lesson well calculated to sober and subdue the giddy.

Now, age had dealt very gently with Gabriel's grandmother; it became her well. Her white hair was even more beautiful now than it had been when she was young, as Meriwether Clopton often declared. Her eyes were bright, and all her sympathies were as keenly alive as they had been fifty years before. She had kept in touch with Gabriel and the young people about her, and none of her faculties had been impaired. She was the gentlest of gentlewomen.

Once Nan had asked her—"Grandmother Lumsden, what is the perfume I smell every time I come here? You have it on your clothes."

"Life Everlasting, my dear." For one brief and fleeting instant, Nan had the odd feeling that she could see millions and millions of years into the future. Life Everlasting! She caught her breath. But the vision or feeling was swept away by the placid voice of Mrs. Lumsden. "I believe you and Gabriel call it rabbit tobacco," she explained.

Nan had a great longing to be with Mrs. Lumsden the moment she heard that Gabriel had been spirited away by the strong arm of the Government. She felt that she would be more comfortable there than at home.

"My dear, what put it into that wise little head of yours to come and comfort an old woman?" Mrs. Lums-

den asked, when Meriwether Clopton and Miss Fanny Tomlin had taken their departure. She was still sitting close to Nan, caressing her hand.

"I thought you would be lonely with Gabriel gone, and I just made up my mind to come. I was afraid until I reached the door, and then I wasn't afraid any more. If you don't want me, I'll soon find it out."

"I can't tell you how glad I am, Nan, to have you here; and I can guess your feelings. No doubt you were shocked to hear that Francis Bethune had been taken with the rest." The dear old lady had the knack of clinging to her ideas.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Grandmother Lumsden. I care no more for Mr. Bethune than I do for the others—perhaps not so much."

"I don't know why it is," said Mrs. Lumsden, "but I have always looked forward to the day when you and Francis would be married."

"I've heard you talk that way before, and I've often wondered why you did it."

"Oh, well! perhaps it is one of my foolish dreams," said Mrs. Lumsden with a sigh.

"Your father's plantation and that of Francis's grandfather are side by side, and I have thought it would be romantic for the heirs to join hands and make the two places one."

"I can't see anything romantic in that, Grandmother Lumsden. It's like a sum in arithmetic."

"Well, you must allow old people to indulge in their

dreams, my dear. When you are as old as I am, and have seen as much of life, you will have different ideas about romance."

"I hope, ma'am, that your next dream will be truer," said Nan, almost playfully.

That night, Nan lay awake for a long time. At last she slipped out of bed, felt her way around it, and leaned over and kissed Gabriel's grandmother. In an instant she felt the motherly arms of the old gentlewoman around her.

"Is that the way you do, when Gabriel comes and kisses you in the night?" whispered Nan wistfully.

"Yes, yes, my dear—many times."

"Oh, I am so glad!" the words exhaled from the girl's lips in a long-drawn, trembling sigh. Then she went back to her place in bed, and soon both the comforter and the comforted were sound asleep.

As has been hinted, the moment Mr. Sanders discovered there was some slight chance of getting a message to Gabriel, he became one of the busiest men in Shady Dale, though his industry was not immediately apparent to his friends and neighbours. Among those whom he took occasion to see was Mr. Tidwell, whose son Jesse was among the prisoners.

"Gus," said Mr. Sanders, without any ceremony, "you remember the row you come mighty nigh havin' wi' Tomlin Perdue, not so many years ago?"

"Yes; I remember something of it," replied Mr. Tidwell. He was a man who ordinarily went with his head held low, as though engaged in deep thought. When

spoken to he straightened up, and thereby seemed to add several inches to his height.

"Well, it's got to be done over ag'in," remarked Mr. Sanders. "It happened in Malvern, didn't it?"

"Yes, in the depot," replied Mr. Tidwell. "We were both on our way to Atlanta, and the Major misunderstood something I had said."

"Egzackly! Well, it must be doné over ag'in."

Mr. Tidwell lowered his head and appeared to reflect. Then he straightened up again, and his face was very serious. "Mr. Sanders, has Tomlin Perdue been dropping his wing about that fuss? Has he been making remarks?"

"Oh, I reckon not," replied Mr. Sanders cheerfully. "But I've got a mighty good reason for axin' you about it. Come in your office, Gus, an' I'll tell you all I know, an' it won't take me two minnits."

They went in and closed the door, and remained in consultation for some time. While they were thus engaged, Silas Tomlin came to the door, tried the bolt, and finding that it would not yield, walked restlessly up and down, preyed upon by many strange and conflicting emotions. He had evidently gone through much mental suffering. His face was drawn and haggard, and his clothes were shabbier than ever. He took no account of time, but walked up and down, waiting for Mr. Tidwell to come out, and as he walked he was the victim both of his fears and his affections. One moment, he heartily wished that he might never see his son again; the next he would have given everything he possessed to have the

boy back, and hear once more the familiar, "Hello, father!"

After awhile, Mr. Sanders and Mr. Tidwell came forth from the lawyer's office. They appeared to be in fine humour, for both were laughing, as though some side-splitting joke had just passed between them.

"There's no doubt about it, Mr. Sanders," Lawyer Tidwell was saying, "you ought to be a major-general!"

"I declare, Tidwell!" exclaimed Silas, with something like indignation, "I don't see how you can go around happy and laughing under the circumstances. You do like you could fetch your son back with a laugh. I wish I could fetch Paul back that way."

"Well, he'd stay whar he is, Silas," said Mr. Sanders, with a benevolent smile, "ef his comin' back had to be brung about by any hilarity from you. Why, you ain't laughed but once sence you was a baby, an' when you heard the sound of it you set up a howl that's lasted ever sence."

"If you think, Silas, that crying will bring the boys back," said Mr. Tidwell, "I'll join you in a crying-match, and stand here and boohoo with you just as long as you want to."

"I just called by to see if you had heard any news," remarked Silas, taking no offence at the sarcastic utterances of the two men. "I am just obliged to get some news. I am on pins: I can't sleep at night; and my appetite is gone."

Mr. Sanders looked at the man's haggard face, and

immediately became serious and sympathetic. "Well, I tell you, Silas, you needn't worry another minnit. The only one amongst 'em that's in real trouble is Gabriel Tolliver. I've looked into the case from A to Izzard, an' that's the way it stan's."

"That is perfectly true," assented Mr. Tidwell. "We can account for the movements of all the boys on the night of the killing except those of Tolliver; and he is in considerable danger. By the way, Silas, you said some time ago—oh, ever so long ago—that you would bring me a copy of *Blackwood's Magazine*. You remember there was a story in it you wanted me to read."

"No, I—well, I tried to find it; I hunted for it high and low; but I haven't been able to put my hands on it. But I've had so much trouble of one kind and another, that I clean forgot it. I'm glad you mentioned it; I'll try to find it again."

"Well, as a lawyer," said Mr. Tidwell, somewhat significantly—or so it seemed to Silas—"I don't charge you a cent for telling you that your case wouldn't stand a minnit."

"My case—my case! What case? I have no case. Why, I don't know what you are talking about." He shook his head and waved his hand nervously.

"Oh, I remember now; your case was purely hypothetical," said Mr. Tidwell. "Well, your *Blackwood* was wrong about it."

"That's what I thought," Silas assented with a grunt; and with that, he turned abruptly away, and went in the direction of his house.

"I'll tell you what's the fact," remarked Mr. Sanders, as he watched the shabby and shrunken figure retreat; "I'm about to change my mind about Silas. I used to think he was mean all through; but he's got a nice warm place in his heart for that son of his'n. I declare I feel right sorry for the man."

Before Cephas went away, he was not too busy learning the lessons Mr. Sanders had set for him to forget to hunt up Nan Dorrington and tell her the wonderful news; to-wit, that he was about to go on a journey, and that while he was gone he would most likely see Gabriel.

"Well," said Nan, drawing herself up a little stiffly, "what is that to me?" Unfortunately, Cephas had come upon the girl when she was talking with Eugenia Claiborne, who had sought her out at the Lumsden Place.

Cephas looked at her hard a moment, and then his freckled face turned red. He was properly angry. "Well, whatever it may be to you, it's a heap to me," he said. "I hope it's nothing to you."

"Cephas, will you see Paul Tomlin?" asked Eugenia. "If you do, tell him that one of his friends sent him her love."

"Is it sure enough love?" inquired Cephas.

"Yes, Cephas, it is," replied Eugenia simply and seriously—but her face was very red. "Tell him that Eugenia Claiborne sent him her love."

"All right," said Cephas, and turned away without looking at Nan. She had hurt his feelings.

This turn of affairs didn't suit Nan at all. She ran

after Cephas, and caught him by the arm. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Cephas, to treat me so? How could I tell you anything before others? If you see Gabriel, tell him—oh, I don't know what to say. If I was to tell you what I want to, you'd say that Nan Dorrington had lost her mind. No, I'll not send any word, Cephas. It wouldn't be proper in a young lady. If he asks about me, just tell him that I am well and happy."

She turned away, in response to a call from Eugenia Claiborne, but she kept her eyes on Cephas for some time. Evidently she wished to send a message, but was afraid to. "Don't be angry with me, Cephas," she said, before the youngster got out of hearing. Cephas made no reply, but trudged on stolidly. He was at the age when a boy is easily disgusted with girls and young women. You may call them sweet creatures if you want to, but a twelve-year-old boy is not to be deceived by fine words. The sweet creatures are under no restraints when dealing with small boys, and the small boys are well acquainted with all their worst traits. What is most strange is that this intimate knowledge is of no service to them when they grow a little older. They forget all about it and fall into the first trap that love sets for them.

Cephas was angry without knowing why. He felt that both Gabriel and himself had been insulted, though he couldn't have explained the nature of the insult; and he was all the angrier because he was fond of Nan. She had been very kind to the little boy—kinder, perhaps,

than he deserved, for he had made the impulsive young lady the victim of many a practical joke.

As Cephas went along, it suddenly occurred to him that he had done wrong to say anything about his proposed journey, and the thought took away all his resentment. He whirled in his tracks, and ran back to where he had left the girls. He saw Eugenia Claiborne sauntering along the street, but Nan was nowhere in sight. He had no trouble in pledging Miss Claiborne to secrecy, for she was very fond of all sorts of secrets, and could keep them as well as another girl.

Nan, she informed Cephas, had expressed a determination to visit him at his own home, and, in fact, Cephas found her there. She was as sweet as sugar, and was not at all the same Nan who had drawn herself up proudly and as good as told Cephas that it was nothing to her that he was going to see Gabriel. No; this was another Nan, and she had a troubled look in her eyes that Cephas had never seen there before.

"I came to see if you were still angry, Cephas," she said by way of explanation. "I wasn't very nice to you, was I?"

"Well, I hope you don't mind Cephas," said the lad's mother. "If you do, he'll keep you guessing. Has he been rude to you, Nan?"

And it was then that Cephas heard praise poured on his name in a steady stream. Cephas rude! Cephas saucy! A thousand times no! Why, he was the best, the kindest, and the brightest child in the town. Nan was so much in earnest that Cephas had to blush.

"I didn't know," said his mother. "He has been going with those large boys so much that I was afraid he was getting too big for his breeches." She loved her son, but she had no illusions about the nature of boys; she knew them well.

"Are you still angry, Cephas?" Nan asked. She appeared very anxious to be sure on that score.

"N-o-o," replied Cephas, somewhat doubtfully; he hesitated to surrender the advantage that he saw he had.

"Yes, you are," said Nan, "and I think it is very unkind of you. I am sorry you misunderstood me; if you only knew how I really feel, and how much trouble I have, you would be sorry instead of angry."

"I'm the one to blame," said Cephas penitently. "Gabriel says you dislike him, and I thought he was only guessing. But he knew better than I did. I had no business to bother you."

Nan caught her breath. "Did Gabriel say I disliked him?"

"He didn't say that word," replied Cephas. "I think he said you detested him, and I told him he didn't know what he was talking about. But he did; he knew a great deal better than I did, because I didn't really know until just now."

"But, Cephas!" cried Nan; "what could have put such an idea in his head?" Cephas's mother was now busy about the house.

"I didn't know then, but I know now," remarked the boy stolidly.

"Don't be unkind, Cephas. If you knew me better,

you'd be sorry for me. You and Gabriel are terribly mistaken. I'm very fond of both of you."

"Oh, *I* don't count in this game," Cephas declared.

"Oh, yes, you do," said Nan. "You are one of my dearest friends, and so is Gabriel."

"All right," said Cephas. "If you treat all your dearest friends as you do Gabriel, I'm very sorry for them."

"Cephas, if you tell Gabriel what I said while Eugenia Claiborne was standing there, all ears, I'll never forgive you." Nan was at her wit's end.

"Tell him that!" cried Cephas; "why, I wouldn't tell him that, not for all the world. I'll tell him nothing."

"Please, Cephas," said Nan. "Tell him"—she paused, and threw her hair away from her pale face—"tell him that if he doesn't come home soon, I shall die!" Then her face turned from pale to red, and she laughed loudly.

"Well, I certainly sha'n't tell him that," said Cephas.

"I didn't think you would," said Nan. "You are a nice little boy, and I am going to kiss you good-bye. If you don't have something sweet to tell me when you come back, I'll think you detest me—wasn't that Gabriel's word? Poor Gabriel! he's in prison, and here we are joking about him."

"I'm not joking about him!" exclaimed Cephas.

"Just as much as I am," said Nan; and then she leaned over and kissed Cephas's freckled face, leaving it very red after the operation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Mr. Sanders Visits Some of His Old Friends

IT will be observed by those who are accustomed to make note of trifles, that the chronicler, after packing Cephas off in a barouche with the handsome Captain Falconer, still manages to retain him in Shady Dale. For the sake of those who may be puzzled over the matter, let us say that it is a mistake of the reporter. That is the way our public men dispose of their unimportant inconsistencies—and the reporter, for his part, can say that the trouble is due to a typographical error. The truth is, however, that when a cornfield chronicler finds himself entangled in a rush of events, even if they are minor ones, he feels compelled to resort to that pattern of the " P. S." which is so comforting to the lady writers, and so captivating to their readers.

Mr. Sanders is supposed to be on his way to Savannah on the same train with Cephas and Captain Falconer, supposing the train to be on time. Nevertheless, it is necessary to give a further account of his movements before he started on the journey that was to prove to be such an important event in Gabriel's career.

On the third morning after the arrest of the young men, Mrs. Lumsden expressed a desire to see Mr. San-

ders, but he was nowhere to be found. Many sympathetic persons, including Nan Dorrington, joined in the search, but it proved to be a fruitless one. As a matter of fact, Mr. Sanders had gone to bed early the night before, but a little after midnight he awoke with a start. This was such an unusual experience that he permitted it to worry him. He had had no dream, he had heard no noise; yet he had suddenly come out of a sound and refreshing sleep with every faculty alert. He struck a match, and looked at his watch. It was a quarter to one.

"I wish, plague take 'em!" he said with a snort, "that somebody would whirl in an' make a match that wouldn't smifflicate the whole house an' lot."

He lit the candle, and then proceeded to draw on his clothes. In the course of this proceeding, he lay back on the bed with his hands under his head. He lay thus for some minutes, and then suddenly jumped to his feet with an exclamation. He put on his clothes in a hurry, and went out to the stables, where he gave his horse a good feed—seventeen ears of corn and two bundles of fodder.

Then he returned to the house, and rummaged around until he found a pitcher of buttermilk and a pone of corn-bread, which he disposed of deliberately, and with great relish. This done, he changed his clothes, substituting for those he wore every day the suit he wore on Sundays and holidays. When all these preparations were complete, the hands of his watch stood at quarter past three. He had delayed and dillydallied in order to

give his horse time to eat. The animal had taken advantage of the opportunity, for when Mr. Sanders went to the stables, the Racking Roan was playfully tossing the bare cobs about in the trough with his flexible upper lip.

"Be jigged ef your appetite ain't mighty nigh as good as mine," he remarked, whereupon the roan playfully bit at him. "Don't do that, my son," protested Mr. Sanders. "Can't you see I've got on my Sunday duds?"

To bridle and saddle the horse was a matter of a few moments only, and when Mr. Sanders mounted, the spirited horse was so evidently in for a frolic that he was going at a three-minute gait by the time the rider had thrown a leg over the saddle.

A horseback ride, when the weather is fine and the sun is shining, is a very pleasing experience, but it is not to be compared to a ride in the dark, provided you are on good terms with your horse, and are familiar with the country. You surrender yourself entirely to the creature's movements, and if he is a horse equipped with courage, common-sense and energy, you are lifted entirely out of your every-day life into the regions of romance and derring-do—whatever that may be. There is no other feeling like it, no other pleasure to be compared to it; all the rest smell of the earth.

"I'm sorter glad I lit that match," Mr. Sanders remarked to the horse. "It's like gittin' a whiff of the Bad Place, an' then breathin' the fresh air of heav'n." The reply of the roan was a sharp affirmative snort.

The sun was just rising when Mr. Sanders rode into Halcyondale. Coincident with his arrival, the train from Atlanta came in with a tremendous clatter. There was much creaking and clanking as it slowed up at the modest station. It paused just long enough for the mail-bag and a trunk to be thrown off with a bang, and then it went puffing away. Short as the pause had been, one of the passengers, in the person of Colonel Bolivar Blasengame, had managed to escape from it. The Colonel, with his valise in his hand, paused to watch the train out of sight, and then leisurely made his way toward his home. To reach that point, he was compelled to cross the public square, and as he emerged from the side street leading to the station, he met Mr. Sanders, who had also been watching the train.

"Hello, Colonel, how are you? We belong apparently to the early bird society."

"Good-morning, Mr. Sanders," replied the Colonel, with a smile of friendly welcome. "What wind has blown you over here?"

"Why, I want to see Major Perdue. You know we have had trouble in our settlement."

"And you want to see Tomlin because you have had trouble; but why is it, Mr. Sanders, that your people never think of me when you have trouble? Am I losing caste in your community?"

"Well, you know, Colonel, you haven't been over sence the year one; an' then the Major is kinder kin to one of the chaps that's been took off."

"Exactly; but did it ever occur to you that whoever

is kin to Tomlin is a little kin to me," remarked the Colonel. "Tomlin is my brother-in-law— But where are you going now?"

"Well, I thought I would go to the tavern, have my hoss put up an' fed, git a snack of somethin' to eat, an' then call on the Major."

"You hadn't heard, I reckon, that the tavern is closed, and the livery-stable broke up," said the Colonel, by way of giving the visitor some useful information.

At that moment a negro came out on the veranda of the hotel—only the older people called it a tavern—and rang the bell that meant breakfast in half an hour.

"What's that?" inquired Mr. Sanders, though he knew well enough.

"It's pure habit," replied the Colonel. "That nigger has been ringing the bell so long that he can't quit it. Anyhow, you can't go to the tavern, and you can't go to Tomlin's. He's got a mighty big family to support, Tomlin has. He's fixin' up to have a son-in-law, and he's already got a daughter, and old Minervy Ann, who brags that she can eat as much as she can cook. No, you can't impose on Tomlin."

"Then, what in the world will I do?" Mr. Sanders asked with a laugh. He was perfectly familiar with the tactics of the Colonel.

"Well, there wasn't any small-pox or measles at my house when I left day before yesterday. Suppose we go there, and see if there's anything the matter. If the stable hasn't blown away or burned down, maybe you'll find a place for your horse, and then we can scuffle

around maybe, and find something to eat. That's a fine animal you're on. He's the one, I reckon, that walked the stringer, after the bridge had been washed away. I never could swallow that tale, Mr. Sanders."

"Nor me nuther," replied Mr. Sanders. "All I know is that he took me across the river one dark night after a fresh, an' some folks on t'other side wouldn't believe I had come across. They got to the place whar the bridge ought to 'a' been long before dark, and they found it all gone except one stringer. I seed the stringer arterwards, but I never could make up my mind that my hoss walked it wi' me a-straddle of his back."

"Still, if he was my horse," Colonel Blasengame remarked, "I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for him, and I reckon you've heard it rumoured around that I haven't got any more money than two good steers could pull."

Mr. Sanders turned his horse's head in the direction that Colonel Blasengame was going, and when they arrived at his home, he stopped at the gate. "Mr. Sanders," he said, taking out his watch, "I'll bet you two dollars and a half to a horn button that breakfast will be ready in ten minutes, and that everything will be fixed as if company was expected."

And it was true. By the time the horse had been put in the stable and fed, breakfast was ready, and when Mr. Sanders was ushered into the room, Mrs. Blasengame was sitting in her place at the table pouring out coffee. She was a frail little woman, but her eyes were bright with energy, and she greeted the unexpected guest as

cordially as if he had come on her express invitation. She had little to say at any time, but when she spoke her words were always to the purpose.

"What did you accomplish?" she asked her husband, after Mr. Sanders, as in duty bound, had praised the coffee and the biscuit, and the meal was well under way.

"Nothing, honey; not a thing in the world. I thought the boys had been carried to Atlanta, but they are at Fort Pulaski."

Mrs. Blasengame said nothing more, and the Colonel was for talking about something else, but the curiosity of Mr. Sanders was aroused.

"What boys was you referrin' to, Colonel?" he asked.

"I don't like to tell you, Mr. Sanders," replied Colonel Blasengame, "but if you'll take no offence, I'll say that the boys are from a little one-horse country settlement called Shady Dale, a place where the people are asleep day and night. A parcel of Yankees went over there the other night, snatched four boys out of their beds, and walked off with them."

"That's so," Mr. Sanders assented.

"Yes, it's so," cried the Colonel hotly. "And it's a——" He caught the eye of his wife and subsided. "Excuse me, honey; I'm rather wrought up over this thing. What worries me," he went on, "is that the boys were yerked out of bed, and carried off, and then their own families went to sleep again. But suppose they didn't turn over and go back to sleep: doesn't that make matters worse? I can't understand it to save my

life. Why, if it had happened here, the whole town would have been wide awake in ten minutes, and the boys would never have been carried across the corporation line. Tomlin is mighty near wild about it. If I hadn't gone to Atlanta, he would have gone; and you know how he is, honey. Somebody would have got hurt."

Yet, strange to say, Major Tomlin Perdue was far cooler and more deliberate than his brother-in-law, Colonel Blasengame. It was the peculiarity of each that he was anxious to assume all the dangerous responsibilities with which the other might be confronted; and the only serious dispute between the two men was in the shape of a hot controversy as to which should call to account the writer of a card in which Major Perdue was criticised somewhat more freely than politeness warranted.

"You are correct in your statement about the four boys bein' took away," said Mr. Sanders, "but you'll have to remember that the woods ain't so full of Blasengames an' Perdues as they used to be; an' you ain't got in this town a big, heavy balance-wheel the size an' shape of Meriwether Clopton."

"Yes, dear, you were about to be too hasty in your remarks," suggested Mrs. Blasengame. Her soft voice had a strangely soothing effect on her husband. "If some of our young men had been seized, all of us, including you, my dear, would have been in a state of paralysis, just as our friends in Shady Dale were."

"The only man in town that know'd it," Mr. Sanders explained, "was Silas Tomlin. He was sleepin' in the

same room wi' Paul, an' they rousted him out, an' took him along. They carried him four or five mile. He had to walk back, an' by the time he got home, the sun was up."

"That puts a new light on it," said the Colonel, "and Tomlin will be as glad to hear it as I am. But I wonder what the rest of the State will think of us."

"My dear, didn't these young men, and the Yankees who arrested them, take the train here?" inquired Mrs. Blasengame. She nodded to Mr. Sanders, and a peculiar smile began to play over that worthy's features.

"By George! I believe they did, honey!" exclaimed the Colonel.

"And in broad daylight?" persisted the lady.

To this the Colonel made no reply, and Mr. Sanders became the complainant. "I dunner what we're comin' to," he declared, "when a passel of Yankees can yerk four of our best young men on a train in this town in broad daylight, an' all the folks a-stanin' aroun' gapin' at 'em, an' wonderin' what they're gwine to do next."

"Say no more, Mr. Sanders; say no more—the mule is yours." This in the slang of the day meant that the point at issue had been surrendered.

"I suppose Lucy Lumsden is utterly crushed on Gabriel's account," remarked Mrs. Blasengame.

"Crushed!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders; "no, ma'am! not much, if any. She's fightin' mad."

"I know well how she feels," said the pale, bright-eyed little woman. "It is a pity the men can't have the same feeling."

"Why, honey, what good would it do?" the Colonel asked, somewhat querulously.

"It would do no good; it would do harm—to some people."

"And yet," said the Colonel, turning to Mr. Sanders with a protesting frown on his face, "when I want to show some fellow that I'm still on top of the ground, or when Tomlin takes down his gun and goes after some rascal, she makes such a racket that you'd think the world was coming to an end."

"A racket! I make a racket? Why, Mr. Blasengame, I'm ashamed of you! the idea!"

"Well, racket ain't the word, I reckon; but you look so sorry, honey, that to me it's the same as making a racket. It takes all the grit out of me when I know that you are sitting here, wondering what minute I'll be brought home cut into jiblets, or shot full of holes."

Mrs. Blasengame laughed, as she rose from the table. She stood tiptoe to pin a flower in her husband's buttonhole.

"You've missed a good deal, Mr. Sanders," said the Colonel, stooping to kiss his wife. "You don't know what a comfort it is to have a little bit of a woman to boss you, and cuss you out with her eyes when you git on the wrong track."

"Yes," said Mr. Sanders, "I allers feel like a widower when I see a man reely in love wi' his wife. It's a sight that ain't as common as it used to be. We'll go now, if you're ready, an' see the Major. I ain't got much time to tarry."

"Oh, you want me to go too?" said the Colonel eagerly. "Well, I'm your man; you can just count on me, no matter what scheme you've got on hand."

They went to Major Perdue's, and were ushered in by Minervy Ann. "I'm mighty glad you come," said she; "kaze 'taint been ten minnits sence Marse Tomlin wuz talkin' 'bout gwine over dar whar you live at; an' he ain't got no mo' business in de hot sun dan a rabbit is got in a blazin' brushpile. Miss Vallie done tole 'im so, an' I done tole 'im so. He went ter bed wid de headache, an' he got up wid it; an' what you call dat, ef 'taint bein' sick? But, sick er well, he'll be mighty glad ter see you."

Aunt Minervy Ann made haste to inform the Major that he had visitors. "I tuck 'em in de settin'-room," she said, "kaze dat parlour look ez cold ez a funer'l. It give me de shivers eve'y time I go in dar. De cheers set dar like dey waitin' fer ter make somebody feel like dey ain't welcome, an' dat ar sofy look like a coolin'-board."

Mr. Sanders was very much at home in the Major's house; he had dandled Vallie on his knee when she was a baby; and he had made the Major's troubles his own as far as he could. Consequently the greeting he received was as cordial as he could have desired. "Major," he said, when he found opportunity to state the nature of his business, "do you know young Gabe Tolliver?"

"Mighty well—mighty well," responded Major Perdue, "and a fine boy he is. He'll make his mark some day."

"Not onless we do somethin' to help him out. They ain't no way in the world he can prove that he didn't kill that feller Hotchkiss. Ike Varner done the killin', but he's gone, an' I think his wife is fixin' to go to Atlanta. They've got the dead wood on Gabriel. They ain't no case at all ag'in the rest; but you know how Gabriel is—he goes moonin' about in the fields both day an' night, an' it's mighty hard for to put your finger on him when you want him. An' to make it wuss, Hotchkiss called his name more'n once before he died. It looks black for Gabriel, an' we must do somethin' for him."

Major Perdue leaned forward a little, a frown on his face, and stretched forth his left hand, in the palm of which he placed the forefinger of his right. "I'll tell you what, Mr. Sanders, I'm just as much obliged to you for coming to me as if you had saved me from drowning. I have come to the point where I can't hold in much longer, and maybe you'll keep me from making a fool of myself. I'll say beforehand, I don't care what your plan is; I don't care to know it—just count on me."

"And where do I come in?" Colonel Blasengame inquired.

"Right by my side," responded Major Perdue.

Without further preliminaries, Mr. Sanders set forth the details of the programme that had arranged itself in his mind, and when he was through, Major Perdue leaned back in his chair, and gazed with admiration at the bland and childlike countenance of this Georgia cracker. The innocence of childhood shone in Mr. Sanders's blue eyes.

"I swear, Mr. Sanders, I'm sorry I didn't have the pleasure of serving with you in Virginia. If there is anything in this world that I like it's a man with a head on him, and that's what you've got. You can count on us if we are alive. I don't know how Bolivar feels about it, but I feel that you have done me a great favour in thinking of me in connection with this business. You couldn't pay either of us a higher compliment."

"Tomlin expresses my views exactly," said Colonel Blasengame; "yet I feel that one of us will be enough. It may be that your scheme will fail, and that those who are engaged in it will have to take the consequence. Now, I'd rather take 'em alone than to have Tumlin mixed up with it."

"Fiddlesticks, Bolivar! you couldn't keep me out of it unless you had a bench-warrant served on me five minutes before the train left, and if you try that, I'll have one served on you. Now, don't forget to tell Tidwell that I'll be glad to renew that dispute. I bear no malice, but when it comes to a row, I don't need malice to keep my mind and my gun in working order. I'm going down to Malvern to-morrow, and before I come away, I'll have everything fixed. There are some details, you know, that never occurred to you: the police, for instance. Well, the chief of police is a very good friend of mine, and the major was Bolivar's adjutant."

"Well, I thank the Lord for all his mercies!" cried Mr. Sanders; and he meant what he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Nan and Margaret

IT was hinted in some of the early chapters of this chronicle that none of the characters would turn out to be very heroic, but this was a mistake. The chronicler had forgotten a few episodes that grew out of the expedition of Cephas to Fort Pulaski—episodes that should have stood out clear in his memory from the first. Cephas was very meek and humble when he started on his expedition, so much so that there were long moments when he would have given a large fortune, if he had possessed it, to be safe at home with his mother. A hundred times he asked himself why he had been foolish enough to come away from home, and trust himself to the cold mercy of the world; and he promised himself faithfully that if he ever got back home alive, he would never leave there again.

Captain Falconer was very kind and attentive to the lad, but he was also very inquisitive. He asked Cephas a great many artful questions, all leading up to the message he was to deliver to Gabriel; but the instructions he had received from Mr. Sanders made Cephas more than a match for the Captain. When the lad came to the years of maturity, he often wondered how a plain

and comparatively ignorant countryman could foresee the questions that were to be asked, and provide simple and satisfactory answers to them; and the matter is still a mystery.

Well, Cephas was not a hero when he started, and if the truth is to be told, he developed none of the symptoms until he had returned home safely, accompanied by Mr. Sanders. Then he became the lion of the village, and was sought after by old and young. All wanted to hear the story of his wonderful adventures. He speedily became a celebrated Cephas, and when he found that he was really regarded as a hero by his schoolmates, and by some of the young women, he was quick to appropriate the character. He became reticent; he went about with a sort of weary and travel-worn look, as if he had seen everything that was worth seeing, and heard everything that was worth hearing.

Now, what Cephas had seen and heard was bad enough. He could hardly be brought to believe that the haggard and wild-eyed young fellow who answered to Gabriel's name at the fort was the Gabriel that he had known, and when he made up his mind that it really was Gabriel, he couldn't hold the tears back. "Brace up, old man," said Gabriel. It was then in a choking voice that Cephas delivered Mr. Sanders's message, using the dog-latin which they both knew so well. And in that tongue Gabriel told Cephas of the tortures to which he and his fellow-prisoners had been subjected, of the horrors of the sweat-boxes, and the terrors of the wrist-rack. So effective was the narrative that Gabriel rattled off in

the school tongue, that when he was ordered back to his solitary cell, Cephas turned away weeping. He was no hero then; he was simply a small boy with a tender heart.

There were grave faces at Shady Dale when Cephas told what he had seen and heard. Major Tomlin Perdue, of Halcyondale, became almost savage when he heard of the indignities to which the unfortunate young men had been subjected. He wrote a card and published it in the *Malvern Recorder*, and the card was so much to the purpose, and created such indignation in the State, that the authorities at Washington took cognisance thereof, and issued orders that there was to be no more torture of the prisoners. This fact, however, was not known until months afterward, and, meanwhile, the newspapers of Georgia were giving a wide publicity to the cruelties which had been practised on the young men, and radicalism became the synonym of everything that was loathsome and detestable. Reprisals were made in all parts of the State, and as was to be expected, the negroes were compelled to bear the brunt of all the excitement and indignation.

The tale that Cephas told to Mr. Sanders was modest when compared to the inventions that occurred to his mind after he found how easy it was to be a hero. Though he pretended to be heartily tired of the whole subject, there was nothing that tickled him more than to be cornered by a crowd of his schoolmates and comrades, all intent on hearing anew the awful recital which Cephas had prepared after his return.

One of the first to seek Cephas out was Nan Dorring-

ton, and this was precisely what the young hero wanted. He was very cold and indifferent when Nan besought him to tell her all about his trip. How did he enjoy himself? and didn't he wish he was back at home many a time? And what did Paul and Jesse have to say? Ah, Cephas had his innings now!

"I didn't see Paul and Jesse," replied Cephas, "and I didn't see Francis Bethune."

"Did they have them hid?" asked Nan.

"I don't know. The one I saw was in a black dungeon. I couldn't hardly see his face, and when I did see it, I was sorry I saw it." Cephas leaned back against the fence with the air of a fellow who has seen too much. Nan was dying to ask a hundred questions about the one Cephas had seen, but she resented his indifferent and placid attitude. All heroes are placid and indifferent when they discuss their deeds, but they wouldn't be if the public in general felt toward them as Nan felt toward Cephas. The only reason she didn't seize the little fellow and give him a good shaking was the fact that she was dying to hear all he had to say about his visit, and all about Gabriel.

Gradually Cephas thawed out. One or the other had to surrender, and the small boy had no such incentive to silence as Nan had. His pride was not involved, whereas Nan would have gone to the rack and suffered herself to be pulled to pieces before she would have asked any direct questions about Gabriel.

"I'm mighty sorry I went," said Cephas finally, and then he stopped short.

"Why?" inquired Nan.

"Oh, well—I don't know exactly. I thought I would find everybody just like they were before they went away, but the one I saw looked like a drove of mules had trompled on him. He didn't have on any coat, and his shirt was torn and dirty, and his face looked like he had been sick a month. His eyes were hollow, and had black circles around them."

"Did he say anything?" asked Nan in a low tone.

"Yes, he said, 'Brace up, old man.'"

"Was that all?"

"And then he asked if anybody had sent him any word, and I said, 'Nobody but Mr. Sanders'; and then he said, 'I might have known that he wouldn't forget me.' Cephas could see Nan crushing her handkerchief in her hand, and he enjoyed it immensely.

"Was he angry with any one?" Nan asked.

"Why, when did anybody ever hear of his being angry with any one he thought was a friend?" exclaimed Cephas scornfully. Nan writhed at this, and Cephas went on. "He had been tied up by the wrists, and then he had been put in a sweat-box, and nearly roasted—yes, by grabs! pretty nigh cooked."

"Why, you didn't tell his grandmother that," said Nan.

"Well, I should say not!" exclaimed Cephas. "What do you take me for? Do you reckon I'd tell that to anybody that cared anything for him? Why, I wouldn't tell his grandmother that for anything in the world, and if she was to ask me about it, I'd deny it."

This arrow went home. Cephas had the unmixed pleasure of seeing Nan turn pale. "I think you are simply awful," she gasped. "You are cruel, and you are unkind. You know very well that I care something for Gabriel. Haven't we been friends since we were children together? Do you suppose I have no feelings?"

"I know what you said when I told you I was going to see Gabriel."

"What was that?" inquired Nan.

"Why, you said, 'Well, what is that to me?'" exclaimed Cephas. He twisted his face awry, and mimicked Nan's voice with considerable success, only he made it more spiteful than that charming young woman could have done.

"Yes, I did say that, but didn't I go to your house, and tell you what to say to Gabriel?"

Cephas laughed scornfully. "Did you think I was going to swallow the joke that you and that Claiborne girl hatched up between you? Do you reckon I'm fool enough to tell Gabriel that you'll die if he don't come home soon?"

"You didn't tell him, then?"

"No, I didn't," replied Cephas. "I would cut off one of my fingers before I'd let him know that there were people here at home making fun of him."

Nan gazed at Cephas as if she suspected him of a joke. But she saw that he was very much in earnest. "I'm glad you didn't tell him," she said finally. Then she laughed, saying, "Cephas, I really did think you had a little sense."

"I have sense enough not to hurt the feelings of them that like me," the boy replied. And he went on his way, trying to reconcile the Nan Dorrington who used to be so kind to him with the Nan Dorrington who was flirting and flitting around with long skirts on. He failed, as older and more experienced persons have failed.

But you may be sure that he felt himself no less a hero because Nan Dorrington had hinted that he had no sense. He knew where the lack of sense was. After awhile, when interested persons ceased to run after him to get all the particulars of his visit to Fort Pulaski, he threw himself in their way, and when the details of his journey began to pall on the appetite of his friends, he invented new ones, and in this way managed to keep the centre of the stage for some time. When he could no longer interest the older folk, he had the school-children to fall back upon, and you may believe that he caused the youngsters to sit with open-mouthed wonder at the tales he told. The fact that he stammered a little, and sometimes hesitated for a word, made not the slightest difference with his audience of young people.

There was one fact that bothered Cephas. He had been told that Francis Bethune was in love with Margaret Gaither, and he knew that the young man was a constant caller at Neighbour Tomlin's, where Margaret lived. Indeed, he had carried notes to her from the young man, and had faithfully delivered the replies. He judged, therefore, as well as a small boy can judge, that there was some sort of an understanding between the two, and he itched for the opportunity to pour the tale

of his adventures into Margaret's ears. He loitered around the house, and threw himself in Margaret's way when she went out visiting or shopping. She greeted him very kindly on each particular occasion, but not once did she betray any interest in Francis Bethune or his fellow-prisoners.

When Nan met Cephas, on the occasion of the interview which has just been reported, she was on her way to Neighbour Tomlin's to pay a visit to Margaret, and thither she went, after giving Cephas the benefit of her views as to his mental capacity. Margaret happened to be out at the moment, but Miss Fanny insisted that Nan should come in anyhow.

"Margaret will be back directly," Miss Fanny said; "she has only gone to the stores to match a piece of ribbon. Besides, I want to talk to you a little while. But good gracious! what is the matter with you? I expected cheerfulness from you at least, but what do I find? Well, you and Margaret should live in the same house; they say misery loves company. Here I was about to ask you why Margaret is unhappy, and I find you looking out of Margaret's eyes. Are you unhappy, too?"

"No, Aunt Fanny, I'm not unhappy; I'm angry. I don't see why girls should become grown. Why, I was always in a good humour until I put on long skirts, and then my troubles began. I can neither run nor play; I must be on my dignity all the time for fear some one will raise her hands and say, 'Do look at that Nan Dorrington! Isn't she a bold piece?' I never was so tired

of anything in my life as I am of being grown. I never will get used to it."

"Oh, you'll get in the habit of it after awhile, child," said Miss Fanny. "But I never would have believed that Nan Dorrington would care very much for what people said."

"Oh, it isn't on my account that I care," remarked Nan, with a toss of her head, "but I don't want my friends to have their feelings hurt by what other people say. If there is anything in this world I detest it is dignity—I don't mean Margaret's kind, because she was born so and can't help it—but the kind that is put on and taken off like a summer bonnet. If I can't be myself, I'll do like Leese Clopton did, I'll go into a convent."

"Well, you certainly would astonish the nuns when you began to cut some of your capers," Miss Fanny declared.

"Am I as bad as all that? Tell me honestly, Aunt Fanny, now while I am in the humour to hear it, what do I do that is so terrible?"

"Honestly, Nan, you do nothing terrible at all. Not even Miss Puella Gillum could criticise you."

"Why, Miss Puella never criticises any one. She's just as sweet as she can be."

"Well, she's an old maid, you know, and old maids are supposed to be critical," said Miss Fanny. "I'll tell you where all the trouble is, Nan: you are sensitive, and you have an idea that you must behave as some of the other girls do—that you must hold your hands and

your head just so. If you would be yourself, and forget all about etiquette and manners, you'd satisfy everybody, especially yourself."

"Why, that is what worries me now; I do forget all about those things, and then, all of a sudden, I realise that I am acting like a child, and a very noisy child at that, and then I'm afraid some one will make remarks. It is all very miserable and disagreeable, and I wish there wasn't a long skirt in the world."

"Well, when you get as old as I am," sighed Miss Fanny, "you won't mind little things like that. Margaret is coming now. I'll leave you with her. Try to find out why she is unhappy. Pulaski is nearly worried to death about it, and so am I."

Margaret Gaither came in as sedately as an old woman. She was very fond of Nan, and greeted her accordingly. Whatever her trouble was, it had made no attack on her health. She had a fine color, and her eyes were bright; but there was the little frown between her eyebrows that had attracted the attention of Gabriel, and it gave her a troubled look.

"If you'll tell me something nice and pleasant," she said to Nan, "I'll be under many obligations to you. Tell me something funny, or if you don't know anything funny, tell me something horrible—anything for a change. I saw Cephas downtown; that child has been trying for days to tell me of his adventures, and I have been dying to hear them. But I keep out of his way; I am so perverse that I refuse to give myself that much pleasure. Oh, if you only knew how mean I am, you

wouldn't sit there smiling. I hear that the dear boys are having a good deal of trouble. Well, it serves them right; they had no business to be boys. They should have been girls; then they would have been perfectly happy all the time. Don't you think so, sweet child?"

Nan regarded her friend with astonishment. She had never heard her talk in such a strain before. "Why, what is the matter with you, Margaret? You know that girls can be as unhappy as boys; yes, and a thousand times more so."

"Oh, I'll never believe it! never!" cried Margaret. "Why, do you mean to tell me that any girl can be unhappy? You'll have to prove it, Nan; you'll have to give the name, and furnish dates, and then you'll have to give the reason. Do you mean to insinuate that you intend to offer yourself as the horrible example? Fie on you, Nan! You're in love, and you mistake that state for unhappiness. Why, that is the height of bliss. Look at me! I'm in love, and see how happy I am!"

"I know one thing," said Nan, and her voice was low and subdued, "if you go on like that, you'll frighten me away. Do you want to make your best friends miserable?"

"Why, certainly," replied Margaret. "What are friends for? I should dislike very much to have a friend that I couldn't make miserable. But if you think you are going to run away, come up to my room and we'll lock ourselves in, and then I know you can't get away."

"Now, what is the matter?" Nan insisted, when they

had gone upstairs, and were safe in Margaret's room. She had seized her friend in her arms, and her tone was imploring.

"I don't think I can tell you, Nan; you would consider me a fool, and I want to keep your good opinion. But I can tell you a part of my troubles. He wants me to marry Francis Bethune! Think of that!" She paused and looked at Nan. "Well, why don't you congratulate me?"

"I'll never believe that," said Nan, decisively. "Did he say that he wanted you to marry Frank Bethune?" The "he" in this case was Pulaski Tomlin.

"Well, he didn't insist on it; he's too kind for that. But Francis has been coming here very often, until our friends in blue gave him a much-needed rest, and I suppose I must have been going around looking somewhat gloomy; you know how I am—I can't be gay; and then he asked me what the trouble was, and finally said that Francis would make me a good husband. Why, I could have killed myself! Think of me, in this house, and occupying the position I do!"

Such heat and fury Nan had never seen her friend display before. "Why, Margaret!" she cried, "you don't know what you are saying. Why, if he or Aunt Fanny could hear you, they would be perfectly miserable. I don't see how you can feel that way."

"No, you don't, and I hope you never will!" exclaimed Margaret. "Nobody knows how I feel. If I could, I would tell you—but I can't, I can't!"

"Margaret," said Nan, in a most serious tone, "has

he or Aunt Fanny ever treated you unkindly?" Nan was prepared to hear the worst.

"Unkindly!" cried Margaret, bursting into tears; "oh, I wish they would! I wish they would treat me as I deserve to be treated. Oh, if he would treat me cruelly, or do something to wound my feelings, I would bless him."

Margaret had led Nan into a strange country, so to speak, and she knew not which way to turn or what to say. Something was wrong, but what? Of all Nan's acquaintances, Margaret was the most self-contained, the most evenly balanced. Many and many a time Nan had envied Margaret's serenity, and now here she was in tears, after talking as wildly as some hysterical person.

"Come home with me, Margaret," cried Nan. "Maybe the change would do you good."

"I thank you, Nan. You are as good as you can be; you are almost as good as the people here; but I can't go. I can't leave this house for any length of time until I leave it for good. I'd be wild to get back; my misery fascinates me; I hate it and hug it."

"I am sure that I don't understand you at all," said Nan, in a tone of despair.

"No, and you never will," Margaret affirmed. "To understand you would have to feel as I do, and I hope you may be spared that experience all the days of your life."

After awhile Nan decided that Margaret would be more comfortable if she were alone, and so she bade her

friend good-bye, and went downstairs, where she found Miss Fanny awaiting her somewhat impatiently.

"Well, what is the trouble, child?" she asked.

Nan shook her head. "I don't know, Aunt Fanny, and I don't believe she knows herself."

"But didn't she give you some hint—some intimation? I don't want to be inquisitive, child; but if she's in trouble, I want to find some remedy for it. Pulaski is in a terrible state of mind about her, and I am considerably worried myself. We love her just as much as if she were our own, and yet we can't go to her and make a serious effort to discover what is worrying her. She is proud and sensitive, and we have to be very careful. Oh, I hope we have done nothing to wound that child's feelings."

"It isn't that," replied Nan. "I asked her, and she said that you treated her too kindly."

"Well," sighed Miss Fanny, "if she won't confide in us, she'll have to bear her troubles alone. It is a pity, but sometimes it is best."

And then there came a knock on the door, and it was so sudden and unexpected that Nan gave a jump.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Bridalbin Finds His Daughter

"THEY'S a gentleman out there what says he wanter see Miss Bridalbin," said the house-girl who had gone to the door. "I tol' him they wan't no sech lady here, but he say they is. It's that there Mr. Borin'," the girl went on, "an' I didn't know if you'd let him go in the parlour."

"Yes, ask him in the parlour," said Miss Fanny, "and then go upstairs and tell Miss Margaret that some one wants to see her."

"Oh, yessum!" said the house-girl with a laugh; "it's Miss Marg'ret; I clean forgot her yuther name."

"The rascal certainly has impudence," remarked Miss Fanny. "Pulaski should know about this." Whereupon, she promptly called Neighbour Tomlin out of the library, and he came into the room just as Margaret came downstairs.

"Wait one moment, Margaret," he said. "It may be well for me to see what this man wants—unless——" He paused. "Do you know this Boring?"

"No; I have heard of him. I have never even seen him that I know of."

"Then I'll see him first," said Neighbour Tomlin.

He went into the parlour, and those who were listening heard a subdued murmur of voices.

"What is your business with Miss Bridalbin?" Neighbour Tomlin asked, ignoring the proffered hand of the visitor.

"I am her father."

Neighbour Tomlin stood staring at the man as if he were dazed. Bridalbin's face bore the unmistakable marks of alcoholism, and he had evidently prepared himself for this interview by touching the bottle, for he held himself with a swagger.

Neighbour Tomlin said not a word in reply to the man's declaration. He stared at him, and turned and went back into the sitting-room where he had left the others.

"Why, Pulaski, what on earth is the matter?" cried Miss Fanny, as he entered the room. "You look as if you had seen a ghost." And indeed his face was white, and there was an expression in his eyes that Nan thought was most piteous.

"Go in, my dear," he said to Margaret. "The man has business with you." And then, when Margaret had gone out, he turned to Miss Fanny. "It is her father," he said.

"Well, I wonder what's he up to?" remarked Miss Fanny. There was a touch of anger in her voice. "She shan't go a step away from here with such a creature as that."

"She is her own mistress, sister. She is twenty years old," replied Neighbour Tomlin.

"Well, she'll be very ungrateful if she leaves us," said Miss Fanny, with some emphasis.

"Don't, sister; never use that word again; to me it has an ugly sound. We have had no thought of gratitude in the matter. If there is any debt in the matter, we are the debtors. We have not been at all happy in the way we have managed things. I have seen for some time that Margaret is unhappy; and we have no business to permit unhappiness to creep into this house." So said Neighbour Tomlin, and the tones of his voice seemed to issue from the fountains of grief.

"Well, I am sure I have done all I could to make the poor child happy," Miss Fanny declared.

"I am sure of that," said Neighbour Tomlin. "If any mistake has been made it is mine. And yet I have never had any other thought than to make Margaret happy."

"I know that well enough, Pulaski," Miss Fanny assented, "and I have sometimes had an idea that you thought too much about her for your own good."

"That is true," he replied. He was a merciless critic of himself in matters both great and small, and he had no concealments to make. He was open as the day, except where openness might render others unhappy or uncomfortable. "Yes, you are right," he insisted; "I have thought too much about her happiness for my own good, and now I see myself on the verge of great trouble."

"If Margaret understood the situation," said Miss Fanny, "I think she would feel differently."

"On the contrary, I think she understands the situation perfectly well; that is the only explanation of her troubles which she has not sought to conceal."

At that moment Margaret came to the door. Her face was very pale, almost ghastly, indeed, but whatever trouble may have looked from her eyes before, they were clear now. She came into the room with a little smile hovering around her mouth. She had no eyes for any one but Pulaski Tomlin, and to him she spoke.

"My father has come," she said. "He is not such a father as I would have selected; still, he is my father. I knew him the moment I opened the door. He wants me to go with him; he says he is able to provide for me. He has claims on me."

"Have we none?" Miss Fanny asked.

"More than anybody in the world," replied Margaret, turning to her; "more than all the rest of the world put together. But I have always said to myself," she addressed Neighbour Tomlin again, "that if it should ever happen that I found myself unable to carry out your wishes, sir, it would be best for me to leave your roof, where all my happiness has come to me." She was very humble, both in speech and demeanour.

Neighbour Tomlin looked at her with a puzzled and a grieved expression. "Why, I don't understand you, Margaret," said Neighbour Tomlin. "What wish of mine have you found yourself unable to carry out?"

"Only one, sir; but that was a very important one; you desired me to marry Mr. Bethune."

"I? Why, you were never more mistaken in your life,"

replied Neighbour Tomlin, with what Miss Fanny thought was unnecessary energy. "I may have suggested it; I saw you gloomy and unhappy, and I had observed the devotion of the young man. What more natural than for me to suggest that—Margaret! you are giving me a terrible wound!" He turned and went into the library, and Margaret ran after him.

It is probable that Nan knows better than any outsider what occurred then. It seems that Margaret, in her excitement, forgot to close the door after her, and Nan was sitting where she could see pretty much everything that happened; and she had a delicious little tale to tell her dear Johnny when she went home, a tale so impossible and romantic that she forgot her own troubles, and fairly glowed with happiness. But it is best not to depend too much on what Nan saw, though her sight was fairly good where her interests were enlisted.

Margaret ran after Neighbour Tomlin and seized him by the arm. "Oh, I never meant to wound you," she cried—"you who have been so kind, and so good! Oh, if you could only read my heart, you would forgive me, instantly and forever."

"I can read my own heart," said Neighbour Tomlin, "and it has but one feeling for you."

"Then kiss me good-bye," she said. "I am going with my father."

"If I kiss you," he replied, "you'll not go."

She looked at him, and he at her, and she found herself in the focus of a light that enabled her to see everything more clearly. She caught his secret and he hers,

and there was no longer any room for misunderstanding. Her father, weak as he was, had been strong enough to provide his daughter with a remedy for the only serious trouble, short of bereavement, that his daughter was ever to know. She refused to return to the parlour, where he awaited her.

"Shall I go?" said Neighbour Tomlin.

"If you please, sir," said Margaret, with a faint smile. She could hardly realise the change that had so suddenly taken place in her hopes and her plans, so swift and unexpected had it been.

Neighbour Tomlin went into the parlour, and made Bridalbin acquainted with the facts.

"Margaret has changed her mind," said Neighbour Tomlin. "She thinks it is best to remain under the care and protection of those whom she knows better than she knows her father."

"Why, she seemed eager to go a moment ago," said Bridalbin; "and you must remember that she is my daughter."

"Her friends couldn't forget that under all the circumstances," Neighbour Tomlin remarked drily.

"I believe her mind has been poisoned against me," Bridalbin declared.

"That is quite possible," replied Neighbour Tomlin; "and I think you could easily guess the name of the poisoner."

"May I see my daughter?"

"That rests entirely with her," said Neighbor Tomlin.

But Margaret refused to see him again. Since her

own troubles had been so completely swept away, her memory reverted to all the troubles her mother had to endure, as the result of Bridalbin's lack of fixed principles, and she sent him word that she would prefer not to see him then or ever afterward; and so the man went away, more bent on doing mischief than ever, though he was compelled to change his field of operations.

And then, after he was gone, a silence fell on the company. Nan appeared to be in a dazed condition, while Miss Fanny sat looking out of the window. Margaret, very much subdued, was clinging to Nan, and Neighbour Tomlin was pacing up and down in the library in a glow of happiness. All his early dreams had come back to him, and they were true. The romance of his youth had been changed into a reality.

Margaret was the first to break the silence. She left Nan, and went slowly to Miss Fanny, and stood by her chair. "What do you think of me?" she said, in a low voice.

For answer, Miss Fanny rose and placed her arms around the girl, and held her tightly for a moment, and then kissed her.

"But I do think, my dear," she said with an effort to laugh, "that the matter might have been arranged without frightening us to death."

"I had no thought of frightening you. Oh, I am afraid I had no thought for anything but my own troubles. Did you know? Did you guess?"

"I knew about Pulaski, but I had to go away from home to learn the news about you. Madame Awtry

called my attention to it, and then with my eyes upon, I could see a great many things that were not visible before."

"Why, how could she know?" cried Margaret. "I have talked with her not more than a half dozen times."

"She is a very wise woman," Miss Fanny remarked, by way of explanation.

"Well, when I get in love, I'll not visit Madame Awtry," said Nan.

"My dear, you have been there once too often," Miss Fanny declared.

"Why, what has she been telling you?" inquired Nan, blushing very red.

"I'll not disclose your secrets, Nan," answered Miss Fanny.

"I would thank you kindly, if I had any," said Nan.

And then, suddenly, while Margaret was standing with her arms around Miss Fanny, she began to blush and show signs of embarrassment.

"Nan," she said, "will you take a boarder for—for —for I don't know how long?"

"Not for long, Nan. Say a couple of weeks." It was Neighbour Tomlin who spoke, as he came out of the library.

"Oh, for longer than that," protested Margaret.

"You must remember that I am getting old, child," he said very solemnly.

"So am I, sir," she said archly. "I am quite as old as you are, I think."

"This is the first quarrel," Nan declared, "and who

knows how it will all end? You are to come and stay as long as you please, and then after that, you are to stay as long as I please."

"I declare, Nan, you talk like an old woman!" exclaimed Miss Fanny; whereupon Nan laughed and said she had to be serious sometimes.

And so it was arranged that Margaret was to stay with Nan for an indefinite period. "I hope you will come to see me occasionally, Mr. Tomlin, and you too, Aunt Fanny," she said with mock formality. "We shall have days for receiving company, just as the fine ladies do in the cities; and you'll have to send in your cards."

The two young women refused to go in the carriage.

"It is so small and stuffy," said Margaret to Neighbour Tomlin, "and to-day I want to be in the fresh air. If you please, sir, don't look at me like that, or I can never go." She went close to him. "Oh, is it all true? Is it really and truly true, or is it a dream?"

"It is true," he said, kissing her. "It is a dream, but it is my dream come true."

"I didn't think," she said, as she went along with Nan, "that the world was as beautiful as it seems to be to-day."

"Mr. Sanders says," replied Nan, "that it is the most comfortable world he has ever found: but somehow —well, you know we can't all be happy the same way at the same time."

"Your day is still to come," said Margaret, "and when it does, I want to be there."

"You say that," remarked Nan, "but you know you would have felt better if you hadn't had so much company. For a wonder Tasma Tid wouldn't go in the house with me. She said something was happening in there. Now, how did she know?" Tasma Tid had joined them as they came through the gate, and now Nan turned to her with the question.

"Huh! we know dem trouble w'en we see um. Dee ain't no trouble now. She done gone—dem trouble. But yan' come mo'." She pointed to Miss Polly Gaither, who came toddling along with her work-bag and her turkey-tail fan.

"Howdy, girls? I'm truly glad to see you. You are looking well both of you, and health is a great blessing. I have just been to Lucy Lumsden's, Nan, and she thinks a great deal of you. I could tell you things that would turn your head. But I'm really sorry for Lucy; she's almost as lonely as I am. They say Gabriel is sure to be dealt with; I'm told there is no other way out of it. Have you two heard anything?" Margaret and Nan shook their heads, but gestures of that kind were not at all satisfactory to Miss Polly. "They say that little Cephas was sent down to prepare Gabriel for the worst. But I didn't say a word about that to Lucy, and if you two girls go there, you must be very careful not to drop a word about it. Lucy is getting old, and she can't bear up under trouble as she used to could. She has aged wonderfully in the past few weeks. Don't you think so, Nan?"

She held up her ear-trumpet as she spoke, and Nan

made a great pretence of yelling into it, though not a sound issued from her lips. Miss Polly frowned. "Don't talk so loud, my dear; you will make people think I'm a great deal deafer than I am. But you always would yell at me, though I have asked you a dozen times to speak only in ordinary tones. Well, I don't agree with you about Lucy. She has broken terribly since Gabriel was carried off; she is not the same woman, she takes no interest in affairs at all. I told her a piece of astonishing news, and she paid no more attention to it than if she hadn't heard it; and she didn't use to be that way. Well, we all have our troubles, and you two will have yours when you grow a little older. That is one thing of which there is always enough left to go around. The supply is never exhausted."

After delivering this truism, Miss Polly waved her turkey-tail fan as majestically as she knew how, and went toddling along home. Miss Polly was a kind-hearted woman, but she couldn't resist the inclination to gossip and tattle. Her tattle did no harm, for her weakness was well advertised in that community; but, unfortunately, her deafness had made her both suspicious and irritable. When in company, for instance, she insisted on feeling that people were talking about her when the conversation was not carried on loud enough for her to hear the sound of the voices, if not the substance of what was said, and she had a way of turning to the one closest at hand, with the remark, "They should have better manners than to talk of the afflictions of an old woman, for it is not at all certain that they will escape." Nat-

urally this would call out a protest on the part of all present, whereupon Miss Polly would shake her head, and remark that she was not as deaf as many people supposed; that, in fact, there were days when she could hear almost as well as she heard before the affliction overtook her.

"I wonder," said Nan, whose curiosity was always ready to be aroused, "what piece of astonishing news Miss Polly has been telling Grandmother Lumsden. Perhaps she has told her of the events of the morning at Mr. Tomlin's."

"That is absurd, Nan," Margaret declared. "Still, it would make no difference to me. He was the only person that I ever wanted to hide my feelings from. I never so much as dreamed that he could care for me—and, oh, Nan! suppose that he should be pretending simply to please me!"

"You goose!" cried Nan. "Whoever heard of that man pretending, or trying to deceive any one? If he was a young man, now, it would be different."

"Not with all young men," Margaret asserted. "There is Gabriel Tolliver—I don't believe he would deceive any one."

"Oh, Gabriel—but why do you mention Gabriel?"

"Because his eyes are so beautiful and honest," answered Margaret.

But Nan tossed her head; she would never believe anything good about Gabriel unless she said it herself—or thought it, for she could think hundreds, yes, thousands, of things about Gabriel that she wouldn't dare to breathe

aloud, even though there was no living soul within a hundred miles. And that fact needn't make Gabriel feel so awfully proud, for there were other persons and things she could think about.

Ah, well! love is such a restless, suspicious thing, such an irritating, foolish, freakish, solemn affair, that it is not surprising the two young women were somewhat afraid of it when they found themselves in its clutches.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Miss Polly Has Some News

THE news which Miss Polly had laid as a social offering at Mrs. Lucy Lumsden's feet, and which she boasted was very astonishing, had the appearance of absurdity on the face of it. Miss Polly, with her work-bag and her turkey-tail fan, had paid a very early visit to the Lumsden Place. She went in very quietly, greeted her old friend in a subdued manner, and then sat staring at her with an expression that Mrs. Lumsden failed to understand. It might have been the result of special and unmitigated woe, or of physical pain, or of severe fatigue. Whatever the cause, it was unnatural, and so Gabriel's grandmother made haste to inquire about it.

"Why, what in the world is the matter, Polly? Are you ill?"

At this Miss Polly acted as if she had been aroused from a dream or a revery. Her work-bag slid from her lap, and her turkey-tail fan would have fallen had it not been attached to her wrist by a piece of faded ribbon. "I declare, Lucy, I don't know that I ought to tell you; and I wouldn't if I thought you would repeat it to a living soul. It is more than marvellous; it is, indeed.

Lucy "—leaning a little nearer, and lowering her voice, which was never very loud—"I honestly believe that Ritta Claiborne is in love with old Silas Tomlin! I certainly do."

"You must have some reason for believing that," said Mrs. Lumsden, with a benevolent smile, the cause of which the ear-trumpet could not interpret.

"Reasons! I have any number, Lucy. I'm certain you won't believe me, but it has come to that pass that old Silas calls on her every night, and they sit in the parlour there and talk by the hour, sometimes with Eugenia, and sometimes without her. It would be no exaggeration at all if I were to tell you that they are talking together in that parlour five nights out of the seven. Now, what do they mean by that?"

"Why, there's nothing in that, Polly. I have heard that they are old acquaintances. Surely old acquaintances can talk together, and be interested in one another, without being in love. Why, very frequently of late Meriwether Clopton comes here. I hope you don't think I'm in love with him."

"Certainly not, Lucy, most certainly not. But do you have Meriwether's portrait hanging in your parlour? And do you go and sit before it, and study it, and sometimes shake your finger at it playfully? I tell you, Lucy, there are some queer people in this world, and Ritta Claiborne is one of them."

"She is excellent company," said Mrs. Lumsden.

"She is, she is," Miss Polly assented. "She is full of life and fun; she sees the ridiculous side of everything;

and that is why I can't understand her fondness for old Silas. It is away beyond me. Why, Lucy, she treats that portrait as if it were alive. What she says to it, I can't tell you, for my hearing is not as good now as it was before my ears were affected. But she says something, for I can see her lips move, and I can see her smile. My eyesight is as good now as ever it was. I'm telling you what I saw, not what I heard. The way she went on over that portrait was what first attracted my attention; but for that I would never have had a suspicion. Now, what do you think of it, Lucy?"

"Nothing in particular. If it is true, it would be a good thing for Silas. He is not as mean as a great many people think he is."

"He may not be, Lucy," responded Miss Polly, "but he brings a bad taste in my mouth every time I see him."

"Well, directly after Sherman passed through," said Mrs. Lumsden, "and when few of us had anything left, Silas came to me, and asked if I needed anything, and he was ready to supply me with sufficient funds for my needs."

"Well, he didn't come to me," Miss Polly declared with emphasis, "and if anybody in this world had needs, I did. You remember Robert Gaither? Well, Silas loaned him some money during the war, and although Robert was in a bad way, old Silas collected every cent down to the very last, and Robert had to go to Texas. Oh, I could tell you of numberless instances where he took advantage of those who had borrowed from him."

"I suppose that Mr. Lumsden had been kind to Silas

when he was sowing his wild oats; indeed, I think my husband advanced him money when he had exhausted the supply allowed him by the executors of the Tomlin estate."

"And just think of it, Lucy—Ritta Claiborne sits there and plays the piano for old Silas, and sometimes Eugenia goes in and sings, and she has a beautiful voice; I'm not too deaf to know that."

It was then that Mrs. Lumsden leaned over and gave the ear-trumpet some very good advice. "If I were in your place, Polly, I wouldn't tell this to any one else. Mrs. Claiborne is an excellent woman; she comes of a good family, and she is cultured and refined. No doubt she is sensitive, and if she heard that you were spreading your suspicions abroad, she would hardly feel like staying in a house where——" Mrs. Lumsden paused. She had it on her tongue's-end to say, "in a house where she is spied upon," but she had no desire in the world to offend that simple-minded old soul, who, behind all her peculiarities and afflictions, had a very tender heart.

"I know what you mean, Lucy," said Miss Polly, "and your advice is good; but I can't help seeing what goes on under my eyes, and I thought there could be no harm in telling you about it. I am very fond of Ritta Claiborne, and as for Eugenia, why she is simply angelic. I love that child as well as if she were my own. If there's a flaw in her character, I have never found it. I'll say that much."

The explanation of Miss Polly's suspicions is not as simple as her recital of them. No one can account for

some of the impulses of the human heart, or the vagaries of the human mind. It is easy to say that after Silas Tomlin had his last interview with Mrs. Claiborne, he permitted his mind to dwell on her personality and surroundings, and so fell gradually under a spell. Such an explanation is not only easy to imagine, but it is plausible; nevertheless, it would not be true. There is a sort of tradition among the brethren who deal with character in fiction that it must be consistent with itself. This may be necessary in books, for it sweeps away at one stroke ten thousand mysteries and problems that play around the actions of every individual, no matter how high, no matter how humble. How often do we hear it remarked in real life that the actions of such and such an individual are a source of surprise and regret to his friends; and how often in our own experience have we been shocked by the unexpected as it crops out in the actions of our friends and acquaintances!

For this and other reasons this chronicler does not propose to explain Silas's motives and movements and try to show that they are all consistent with his character, and that, therefore, they were all to be predicated from the beginning. What is certainly true is that Silas was one day stopped in the street by Eugenia, who inquired about Paul. He looked at the girl very gloomily at first, but when he began to talk about the troubles of his son, he thawed out considerably. In this case Eugenia's sympathies abounded, in fact were unlimited, and she listened with dewy eyes to everything Silas would tell her about Paul.

"You mustn't think too much about Paul," remarked Silas grimly, as they were about to part.

"Thank you, sir," replied Eugenia, with a smile, "I'll think just enough and no more. But it was my mother that told me to ask about him if I saw you. She is very fond of him. You never come to see us now," the sly creature suggested.

Silas stared at her before replying, and tried to find the gleam of mockery in her eyes, or in her smile. He failed, and his glances became shifty again. "Why, I reckon she'd kick me down the steps if I called without having some business with her. If you were to ask her who her worst enemy is, she'd tell you that I am the man."

"Well, sir," replied Eugenia archly, "I have been knowing mother a good many years, but I've never seen her put any one out of the house yet. We were talking about you to-day, and she said you must be very lonely, now that Paul is away, and I know she sympathises with those who are lonely; I've heard her say so many a time."

"Yes; that may be true," remarked Silas, "but she has special reasons for not sympathising with me. She knows me a great deal better than you do."

"I'm afraid you misjudge us both," said Eugenia demurely. "If you knew us better, you'd like us better. I'm sure of that."

"Humph!" grunted Silas. Then looking hard at the girl, he bluntly asked, "Is there anything between you and Paul?"

"A good many miles, sir, just now," she answered, making one of those retorts that Paul thought so fine.

"H-m-m; yes, you are right, a good many miles. Well, there can't be too many."

"I think you are cruel, sir. Is Paul not to come home any more? Paul is a very good friend of mine, and I could wish him well wherever he might be; but how would you feel, sir, if he were never to return?"

"Well, I must go," said Silas somewhat bluntly. When Beauty has a glib tongue, abler men than Silas find themselves without weapons to cope with it.

"Shall I tell mother that you have given your promise to call soon?" Eugenia asked.

"Now, I hope you are not making fun of me," cried Silas with some irritation.

"How could that be, sir? Don't you think it would be extremely pert in a young girl to make fun of a gentleman old enough to be her father?"

Silas winced at the comparison. "Well, I have seen some very pert ones," he insisted, and with that he bade her good-day with a very ill grace, and went on about his business, of which he had a good deal of one kind and another.

"Mother," said Eugenia, after she had given an account of her encounter with Silas, "I believe the man has a good heart and is ashamed of it."

"Why, I think the same may be said of most of the grand rascals that we read about in history; and the pity of it is that they would have all been good men if

they had had the right kind of women to deal with them and direct their careers."

"Do you really think so, mother?" the daughter inquired.

"I'm sure of it," said the lady.

Then after all there might be some hope for old Silas Tomlin. And his instinct may have given him an inkling of the remedy for his particular form of the whimsies, for it was not many days before he came knocking at the lady's door, where he was very graciously received, and most delightfully entertained. Both mother and daughter did their utmost to make the hours pass pleasantly, and they succeeded to some extent. For awhile Silas was suspicious, then he would resign himself to the temptations of good music and bright conversation. Presently he would remember his suspicions, and straighten himself up in his chair, and assume an attitude of defiance; and so the first evening passed. When Silas found himself in the street on his way home, he stopped still and reflected.

"Now, what in the ding-nation is that woman up to? What is she trying to do, I wonder? Why, she's as different from what she was when I first knew her as a butterfly is from a caterpillar. Why, there ain't a pearter woman on the continent. No wonder Paul lost his head in that house! She's up to something, and I'll find out what it is."

Silas was always suspicious, but on this occasion he bethought himself of the fact that he had not been dragged into the house; he had been under no compul-

sion to knock at the door; indeed, he had taken advantage of the slightest hint on the part of the daughter—a hint that may have been a mere form of politeness. He remembered, too, that he had frequently gone by the house at night, and had heard the piano going, accompanied by the singing of one or the other of the ladies. His reflections would have made him ashamed of himself, but he had never cultivated such feelings. He left that sort of thing to the women and children.

In no long time he repeated his visit, and met with the same pleasurable experience. On this occasion, Eugenia remained in the parlour only a short time. For a diversion, the mother played a few of the old-time tunes on the piano, and sang some of the songs that Silas had loved in his youth. This done, she wheeled around on the stool, and began to talk about Paul.

"If I had a son like that," she said, "I should be immensely proud of him."

"You have a fine daughter," Silas suggested, by way of consolation.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Yes, but you know we always want that which we have not. Yet they say that envy is among the mortal sins."

"Well, a sin's a sin, I reckon," remarked Silas.

"Oh, no! there are degrees in sin. I used to know a preacher who could run the scale of evil-doing and thinking, just as I can trip along the notes on the piano."

"They once tried to make a preacher out of me," remarked Silas, "but when I slipped in the church one

day and went up into the pulpit, I found it was a great deal too big for me."

"They make them larger now," said the lady, "so that they will hold the exhorter and the horrible example at the same time."

"Did Paul ever see my picture there?" asked Silas, changing the conversation into a more congenial channel.

"Why, I think so," replied the lady placidly. "I think he asked about it, and I told him that we had known each other long ago, which was not at all the truth."

"What did Paul say to that?" asked Silas eagerly.

"He said that while some people might think you were queer, you had been a good dad to him. I think he said dad, but I'll not be sure."

"Yes, yes, he said it," cried Silas, all in a glow. "That's Paul all over; but what will the poor boy think when he finds out what you know?"

"Why, he'll enjoy the situation," said the lady, laughing. "As you Georgians say, he'll be tickled to death."

Silas regarded her with astonishment, his hands clenched and his thin lips pressed together. "Do you think, Madam, that it is a matter for a joke? You women——"

"Can't I have my own views? You have yours, and I make no objection."

"But think of what a serious matter it is to me. Do you realise that there is nothing but a whim betwixt me and disgrace—betwixt Paul and disgrace?"

"A whim? Why, you are another Daniel O'Connell! Call me a hyperbole, a rectangled triangle, a parenthesis, or a hyphen." She was laughing, and yet it was plain to be seen that she had no relish for the term which Silas had unintentionally applied to her.

"I meant to say that if the notion seized you, you would fetch us down as a hunter bags a brace of doves."

"Doves!" exclaimed Mrs. Claiborne, with a comical lift of the eyebrows.

"Buzzards, then!" said Silas with some heat.

"Oh, you overdo everything," laughed the lady.

"Well, there's nobody hurt but me," was Silas's gruff reply.

"And Paul," suggested the lady, with a peculiar smile.

"Well, when I say Paul, I mean myself. I've been called worse names than buzzard by people who were trying to walk off with my money. Oh, they didn't call me that to my face," said Silas, noticing a queer expression in the lady's eyes. "And people who should have known better have hated me because I didn't fling my money away after I had saved it."

"Well, you needn't worry about that," Mrs. Claiborne remarked. "You will have plenty of company in the money-grabbing business before long. I can see signs of it now, and every time I think of it I feel sorry for our young men, yes, and our young women, and the long generations that are to come after them. In the course of a very few years you will find your business

to be more respectable than any of the professions. You remember how, before the war, we used to sneer at the Yankees for their money-making proclivities? Well, it won't be very long before we'll beat them at their own game; and then our politicians will thrive, for each and all of them will have their principles dictated by Shylock and his partners."

"Why, you talk as if you were a politician yourself. But why are you sorry for our young women?"

"That was a hasty remark. I am sorry for those who will grow weary and fall by the wayside. The majority of them, and the best of them, will make themselves useful in thousands of ways, and new industries will spring up for their benefit. They will become workers, and, being workers, they will be independent of the men, and finally begin to look down on them as they should."

"Well!" exclaimed Silas, and then he sat and gazed at the lady for the first time with admiration. "Where'd you learn all that?" he asked after awhile.

"Oh, I read the newspapers, and such books as I can lay my hands on, and I remember what I read. Didn't you notice that I recited my piece much as a school-boy would?"

"No, I didn't," replied Silas. "I do a good deal of reading myself, but all those ideas are new to me."

"Well, they'll be familiar to you just as soon as our people can look around and get their bearings. As for me, I propose to become an advanced woman, and go on the stage; there's nothing like being the first in the field.

I always told my husband that if he died and left me without money, I proposed to earn my own living."

"You told your husband that? When did you tell him?" inquired Silas with some eagerness.

"Oh, long before he died," replied the lady.

Silas sat like one stunned. "Do you mean to tell me that your husband is dead?"

"Why, certainly," replied Mrs. Claiborne. "What possible reason could I have for denying or concealing the fact?"

Silas straightened himself in his chair, and frowned. "Then why did you come here and pretend—pretend—ain't you Ritta Rozelle, that used to be?"

"There were two of them," the lady replied. "They were twins. One was named Clarita, and the other Floretta, but both were called Ritta by those who could not distinguish them apart. I had reason to believe that you hadn't treated my sister as you should have done, and I came here to see if you would take the bait. You snapped it up before the line touched the water. It was not even necessary for me to try to deceive you. You simply shut your eyes and declared that I was your wife and that I had come."

"You are the sister who was going to school in—wasn't it Boston?"

"Yes; that is why I am broad-minded and free from guile," remarked the lady with a laugh so merry that it irritated Silas.

"Then you have never been married to me," Silas suggested, still frowning.

"I thank you kindly, sir, I never have been."

"Well, you never denied it," he said.

"You never gave me an opportunity," she retorted.

"You simply sat back, and watched me make a fool of myself."

"You express it very well."

Silas squirmed on his chair. "Why, you knew me the minute you saw me!" he cried.

"Therefore you are still sure I am the woman you married in Louisiana. Well, the man who was driving the hack the day of my arrival, saw you in the fields, and he made a remark I have never forgotten. He said —she mimicked Mr. Goodlett as well as she could— 'Well, dang my hide! ef thar ain't old Silas Tomlin out huntin'! Ef he shoots an' misses he'll pull all his ha'r out.' 'Why?' I asked. 'Bekaze he can't afford to waste a load of powder an' shot.'"

Silas tried to smile. He knew that the point of Mr. Goodlett's joke was lost on the lady.

Silas tried to smile, but the effort was too much for him, and he frowned instead. "You did all you could to humour my mistake," he declared.

"I certainly did," said Mrs. Claiborne, very seriously. "I had good reason to believe that your treatment of my sister was not what it should have been."

"Good Lord! she wouldn't let me treat her well. Why, we hadn't been married three months before she took a dislike to me, and she never got over it. The truth is, she couldn't bear the sight of me. I did what any other young man would have done. I packed up

my things and came back home. I told Dorrington about it when I came back, and he said the trouble was a form of hysterics that finally develops into insanity."

"Yes, that was what happened to my poor sister," said Mrs. Claiborne, "and I never knew the facts until a few months ago. Our aunt, you know, always contended that you were the cause of it all. But Judge Vardeman, quite by accident, met the physician who had charge of the case, and I have a letter from him which clearly explains the whole matter."

Silas Tomlin sat silent for a long time, his gaze fixed on the floor. "Well, well! here I have been going on for years under the impression that I was partly responsible for that poor girl's troubles; and it has been a nightmare riding me every minute that I had time to think." He stood up, stretched his arms above his head, and drew a long breath. "I thank you for laying my ghost, and I'll bid you good-night."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Mr. Sanders Receives a Message

THE demeanour of Mr. Sanders about this time was a seven days' wonder in Shady Dale. As Mrs. Absalom declared, he had tucked his good-humour under the bed, and was now going about in a state of gloom. This at least was the general impression; but Mr. Sanders was not gloomy. He was filled to the brim with impatience, and was to be seen constantly walking the streets, or occupying his favourite seat on the court-house steps, the seat that had always attracted him when he was communing with John Barleycorn. But he and John Barleycorn were strangers now; they were not on speaking terms. He avoided the companionship of those who were in the habit of seeking him out to enjoy his drolleries; and various rumours flew about as to the cause of his apparent troubles. He was on the point of joining the church, having had enough of the world's sinfulness; he had lost the money he made by selling cotton directly after the war; he had been jilted by some buxom country girl. In short, when a man is as prominent in a community as Mr. Sanders was in Shady Dale, he must pay such penalty as gossip levies when his conduct becomes puzzling or problematical.

The tittle-tattle of the town ran in a different direction when some one discovered that the Racking Roan was tied every day to the rack behind the court-house. Then the gossips were certain that the Yankees were after Mr. Sanders, and his horse was placed close at hand in order to give him an opportunity to escape. Mr. Sanders apparently confirmed this rumour when he told Cephas to take the horse to Clopton's, should he find the animal standing at the rack after sundown.

As Mr. Sanders walked about, or sat on the court-house steps, he wondered if he had made all the arrangements necessary to the scheme he had in view. Hundreds and hundreds of times he went over the ground in his mind, and reviewed every step he had taken, trying to discover if anything had been omitted, or if there were any flaw in the plan he proposed to follow. He had made all his arrangements beforehand. He had made a visit to Malvern, and remained there several days. He had met the Mayor of the city, the Chief of Police, and the latter had casually introduced him to the Chief of the Fire Department.

Mr. Sanders accounted himself very fortunate in making the acquaintance of the Fire Chief, who was what might be termed one of the unreconstructed. He was something more than that, he was an irreconcilable, who would have been glad of an opportunity to take up arms again. This official took an eager interest in the scheme which Mr. Sanders had in view; in fact, as he said himself, it was a personal interest. He invited Mr. Sanders to the head-quarters of the Fire Department.

"I'll tell you why I want you to come," he said. "There's a man in my office, or he will be there when we arrive, who is likely to take as much interest in this thing as I do—he couldn't take more—and I want him to hear your plan. Have you ever heard of Captain Buck Sanford?"

Mr. Sanders paused in the street, and stared at the Fire Chief. "Heard of him? Well, I should say! He's the feller that fights a duel before breakfast to git up an appetite. Well, well! How many men has Buck Sanford winged?"

"Oh, quite a number, but not as many as he gets credit for. He comes in my private office every morning, and he's a great help to me. He was rather down at the heels right after the war, and then I happened to find out that he had a great talent in getting the truth out of criminals. We sometimes arrest a man against whom there is no direct evidence of guilt, and if we didn't have some one skilful enough to make him own up, we could do nothing. Buck always knows whether a fellow is guilty or not, and we turn over the suspects to him, and whatever he says goes. He sits in my office like a piece of furniture, and you'd think he was a wooden man. Now you go down with me, and go over your scheme so that Buck can hear you, and whatever he says do, will be the thing to do."

When Mr. Sanders and the Chief arrived at the headquarters of the department, and entered the private office, they found a pale and somewhat emaciated young man sitting in a chair, which was leaned against the wall

at a somewhat dangerous angle. He was apparently asleep; his eyes were closed, and he held between his teeth a short but handsome pipe. He made no movement whatever when the two entered the room. His hat was on the floor at the side of his chair, and had evidently fallen from his head. If Mr. Sanders had been called on to describe the young man, he would have said that he was a weasly looking creature, half gristle and half ghost. His hands were small and thin, and the skin of his face had the appearance of parchment.

At the request of the Chief, Mr. Sanders went over the details of his plan from beginning to end, and at the close the young man, who had apparently been asleep, remarked in a thin, smooth voice, "Won't it be a fine day for a parade!"

His eyes remained closed; he had not even taken the pipe out of his mouth. There was a silence of many long seconds. But the weakly looking man made no movement, nor did he add anything to his remark. Evidently, he had no more to say.

"Buck is right," said the Chief.

"What does he mean?" Mr. Sanders inquired.

"Why, he means that it will be a fine day for a general turn-out of the department," replied the Chief.

Mr. Sanders reflected a moment, and then made one of his characteristic comments. "Be jigged ef he ain't saved my life!"

"Captain Sanford, this is Mr. Sanders, of Shady Dale," said the Chief, by way of introducing the two men. Both rose, and Mr. Sanders found himself look-

ing into the eyes of one of the most interesting characters that Georgia ever produced. Captain Buck Sanford was one of the last of the knights-errant, the self-constituted champion of all women, old or young, good or bad. He said of himself, with some drollery, that he was one of the scavengers of society, and he declared that the job was important enough to command a good salary.

No man in his hearing ever used the name of a woman too freely without answering for it; and it made no difference whether the woman was rich or poor, good or bad. Otherwise he was the friendliest and simplest of men, as modest as a woman, and entirely unobtrusive. His duel with Colonel Conrad Asbury, one of the most sensational events in the annals of duelling, owing to the fact that the weapons were shot-guns at ten paces, was the result of a remark the Colonel had made about a lady whom Sanford had never seen. But so far as the general public knew, it grew out of the fact that the Colonel had spilled some water on Sanford's pantaloons.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Sanders, "I've heard tell of you many a time, an' I'm right down glad to see you."

"You haven't heard much good of me, I reckon," Captain Sanford remarked.

"Yes; not so very long ago I heard a fine old lady say that if they was more Buck Sanfords, the wimmen would be better off."

A faint colour came into the face of the duellist. "Is that so?" he asked with some eagerness.

" It's jest like I tell you, an' the lady was Lucy Lumsden, the grandmother of this chap that we're tryin' to git out'n trouble."

" I wonder if Tomlin Perdue wouldn't let me into the row? " inquired Captain Sanford. " You see, it's this way: If the boy can't break away, it would be well for a serious accident to happen, and in that case, you'll need a man that's perfectly willing to bear the brunt of such an accident."

" We'll see about that," said Mr. Sanders.

" Suppose it's a rainy day, Buck; what then? " asked the Chief.

" And you a grown man! " exclaimed Mr. Sanford, sarcastically. " Did you ever hear of a false alarm? Or were you at a Sunday-school picnic when it was rung in? Oh, I'm going to get a blacksmith and have your head worked on," and with that, Captain Buck Sanford turned on his heel and went out.

" I know Buck was pleased with your plan," the Chief declared. " He nodded at me a time or two when you wasn't looking. If you can work him into the row, it will tickle him mightily. He ain't flighty; he never gets mad; and he always knows just what to do, and when to shoot."

Thus, long before he became impatient enough to walk the streets, or seek consolation on the court-house steps, which he called his liquor-post, Mr. Sanders had made all the arrangements necessary to the success of his scheme. He had sent a suit of clothes to a friend in Malvern, he had shipped three bales of cotton to the firm

of Vardeman & Stark, who had been informed of the use to which Mr. Sanders desired to put it; he had hired an ox-cart, and made a covered waggon of it; and the yoke of oxen he proposed to use had been driven through the country and were now at Malvern.

In short, no matter how deeply Mr. Sanders might ponder over the matter, there was nothing he could think of to add to the details of the arrangement that he had already made.

One morning, while Nan, who was on her way to borrow a book from Eugenia Claiborne, was leaning on the court-house fence talking to Mr. Sanders, Tasma Tid cried out, "Yonner dee come! yonner dee come!" The African, who had heard the rumour that the Yankees were after Mr. Sanders, concluded that this was the advance guard, and she therefore sounded the alarm. But only a solitary rider was in sight, and he was coming as fast as a tired horse could fetch him. By the time this rider had reached the public square, Mr. Sanders had mounted the Racking Roan, and was awaiting him. The rider was no other than Colonel Blasengame, who had insisted on bringing the message himself.

He was the bearer of a telegram addressed to Major Perdue. "Consignment will be shipped to-morrow night. Reach Malvern next morning. Invoice by mail." This was signed by the firm of factors with whom Meriwether Clopton had had dealings for many years. It was the form of announcement that had been agreed on, and to Mr. Sanders the message read, "The prisoners will go to Atlanta to-morrow night, and they

will reach Malvern the next morning. This information can be relied on."

"It's a joy to see you, Colonel," cried Mr. Sanders. "One more day of waitin' would 'a' pulled the rivets out. You know Miss Nan Dorrington, don't you, Colonel Blasengame? I lay you used to dandle her on your knee when she was a baby."

The Colonel bowed lower to Nan than if she had been a queen. "You are not to go to the tavern," remarked Mr. Sanders. "Meriwether Clopton wants the messenger to go straight to his house, an' he'll be all the gladder bekaze it's you. Gus Tidwell will drive you home in his buggy in the cool of the evenin', an' you can leave your hoss at Clopton's for a day or two. Ef you see Tidwell, Nan, please tell him that the Colonel is at Clopton's. I reckon you'll be willin' to buss me, honey, the next time you see me."

"If you have earned it, Mr. Sanders," said Nan, trying to smile.

Thereupon, Mr. Sanders waved his hand miscellaneously, as he would have described it, and moved away at a clipping gait, stirring up quite a cloud of dust as he went. He reached Halcyondale, and at once sought out Major Tomlin Perdue, and found that a telegram had already been sent to Captain Buck Sanford, whose prompt reply over the wire had been, "All skue vee," which was as satisfactory as any other form of reply would have been—more so, perhaps, for it showed that the Captain was in high good-humour.

Mr. Tidwell and Colonel Blasengame arrived in time

to eat a late supper, and the next morning found them all ready to take the train for Malvern. Major Perdue and Mr. Sanders were in high feather. Somehow their spirits always rose when a doubtful issue was to be faced. On the other hand, Colonel Blasengame and Mr. Tidwell were somewhat thoughtful—the Colonel because he had an idea that they were trying to "crowd him into a back seat," as he expressed it, and Mr. Tidwell because it had occurred to him that his presence might tend to jeopardise the case of his son. They were not gloomy; on the contrary they were cheerful; but their spirits failed to run as high as those of Mr. Sanders and Major Perdue, who were engaged all the way to Malvern in relating anecdotes and narrating humourous stories. It seemed that everything either one of them said reminded the other of a story or a humourous incident, and they kept the car in a roar until Malvern was reached.

Mr. Sanders did not go at once to the hotel, but turned his attention to the various details which he had arranged for. Mr. Tidwell went to the hotel opposite the railway station, while Major Perdue and Colonel Blasengame, for obvious reasons, went to the rival hotel. There they found Captain Buck Sanford lounging about with a Winchester rifle slung across his shoulder. A great many people were interested when this pale and weary-looking little man appeared in public with a gun in his hands, and he was compelled to answer many questions in regard to the event. To all he made the same reply, namely, that he had been out practising at a target.

"I'm getting so I can't miss," he said to Major Per-

due. "I wasted twenty-four cartridges trying to miss the bull's eye, but I couldn't do it. I don't know what to make of it," he complained. "There must be something wrong with me. That kind of shooting don't look reasonable. I'm afraid something is going to happen to me. It may be a sign that I'm going to fall over a cellar-door and break my neck, or tumble downstairs and injure my spine."

Then he left his gun with a clerk in the hotel, and, taking Major Perdue by the arm, went into a corner and discussed the scheme which Mr. Sanders had mapped out. They were joined presently by Colonel Blasengame; and as they sat there, whispering together, and making many emphatic gestures, they were the centre of observation, and word went around that some personal difficulty, in which these noted men were to act together, was imminent.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Malvern Has a Holiday

VERY early the next morning Malvern aroused itself to the fact that the firemen and the police, and a very large crowd of the rag, tag and bobtail that hangs on the edge of all holiday occasions, were out for a frolic. A band was playing, and the old-fashioned apparatus with which fire departments were provided in that day and time, was showing the amazed and amused crowd how to put out an imaginary conflagration. And it succeeded, too. Worked as it was by hand-power, it sent a famously strong stream into the very midst of the imaginary conflagration; and when the fire raged no longer, the gallant firemen turned the stream on the rag, tag and bobtail, and such screams and such a scattering as ensued has no parallel in the history of Malvern, which is a long and varied one.

But what did it all mean? It was some kind of a celebration, of course, but why then did the *Malvern Recorder*, one of the most enterprising newspapers in the State, as its editors and proprietors were willing to admit, why, then, did the *Recorder* fail to have an appropriate announcement of an event so interesting and important? Was our public press, the palladium of our

liberties, losing its prestige and influence? Certainly it seemed so, when such an affair as this could be devised and carried out without an adequate announcement in the organ of public opinion.

After awhile there was a lull in the display. The Chief, who was stationed near the depot, received authoritative information that the train from Savannah was approaching. He waved his trumpet, and the firemen formed themselves into a procession, and passed twice in review before their Chief, and then halted, with their hose reels, and their hook and ladder waggons almost completely blocking up the entrance to the station. The crowd had followed them, but the police managed to keep the street clear, so that vehicles might effect a passage.

It was well that the officers of the law had been thus thoughtful in the matter, otherwise a countryman who chanced to be coming along just then would have found it difficult to drive his team even half way through the jam. He was a typical Georgia farmer in his appearance. He wore a wide straw hat to preserve his complexion, a homespun shirt and jeans trousers, the latter being held in place by a dirty pair of home-made suspenders. He drove what is called a spike-team, two oxen at the wheels, and a mule in the lead. The day was warm, but he was warmer. The crowd had flurried him, and he was perspiring more profusely than usual. He was also inclined to use heated language, as those nearest him had no difficulty in discovering. In fact, he was willing to make a speech, as the crowd into which he was

wedging his team grew denser and denser. It was observed that when the crowd really impeded the movements of his team, he had a way of touching the mule in the flank with the long whip he carried. This was invariably the signal for such gyrations on the part of the mule as were calculated to make the spectators pay due respect to the animal's heels.

"I don't see," said the countryman, "why you fellers don't get out some'rs an' go to work. They's enough men in this crowd to make a crop big enough to feed a whole county, ef they'd git out in the field an' buckle down to it stidder loafin' roun' watchin' 'em spurt water at nothin'. It's a dad-blamed shame that the courts don't take a han' in the matter. Ef you lived in my county, you'd have to work or go to the poor-house. Whoa, Beck! Gee, Buck! Why don't you gee, contrive your hide!"

At a touch from the whip, the rearing, plunging, and kicking of the mule were renewed, and the team managed to fight its way to a point opposite where the chief officials of the Police and Fire Department were standing. The waggon to which the team was attached was a ramshackle affair apparently, but was strong enough, nevertheless, to sustain the weight of three bales of cotton, one of the bales being somewhat larger than the others.

"My friend," said the Chief of Police, elevating his voice so that the countryman could hear him distinctly, "this is not a warehouse. If you want to sell your cotton, carry it around the corner yonder, and there you'll find the warehouse of Vardeman & Stark."

"If I want to sell my cotton? Well, you don't reckon I want to give it away, do you? Way over yander in the fur eend of town, they told me that the cotton warehouse was down here some'rs, an' that it was made of brick. This shebang is down yander, an' it's made of brick. How fur is t'other place?"

"Right around the corner," said one in the crowd.

"Humph—yes; that's the way wi' ever'thing in this blamed town; it's uther down yander, or right around the corner. But ef it was right here, how could I git to it? Deliver me from places whar they celebrate Christmas in the hottest part of June! Ef I ever git out'n the town you'll never ketch me here ag'in—I'll promise you that."

"Oh, Mister, please don't say that!" wailed some humourist in the crowd. "There's hundreds of us that couldn't live without you."

"Oh, is that you?" cried the countryman. "Tell your sister Molly that I'll be down as soon as I sell my cotton." This set the crowd in a roar, for though the humourist had no sister Molly, the retort was accepted as a very neat method of putting an end to impertinence.

Inside the station another scene was in the full swing of action. Certain well-known citizens of Halcyondale had been pacing up and down the planked floor of the station apparently awaiting with some impatience for the moment to come when the train for Atlanta would be ready to leave. But the train itself seemed to be in no particular hurry. The locomotive was not panting and snorting with suppressed energy, as the moguls do

in our day, but stood in its place with the blue smoke curling peacefully from its black chimney. Presently an access of energy among the employees of the station gave notice to those who were familiar with their movements that the train from Savannah was crossing the "Y."

Mr. Tidwell, of Shady Dale, who was also among those who were apparently anxious to take the train for Atlanta, ceased his restless walking, and stood leaning against one of the brick pillars supporting the rear end of the structure. Major Tomlin Perdue, on the other hand, leaned confidently on the counter of the little restaurant, where a weary traveller could get a cup of hasty and very nasty coffee for a dime. The Major was acquainted with the vendor of these luxuries, and he informed the man confidentially that he was simply waiting a fair opportunity to put a few lead plugs into the carcass of the person at the far end of the station, who was no other than Mr. Tidwell.

"Is that so?" asked the clerk breathlessly. "Well, I don't mind telling you that he has been having some of the same kind of talk about you, and you'd better keep your eye on him. They say he's 'most as handy with his pistol as Buck Sanford."

Slowly the Savannah train backed in, and slowly and carelessly Major Perdue sauntered along the raised floor. They had decided that the prisoners would most likely be in the second-class coach, and they purposed to make that coach the scene of their sham duel. It was a very delicate matter to decide just when to begin oper-

ations. A moment too soon or too late would be decisive. When this point was referred to Mr. Sanders, he settled it at once. "What's your mouth for, Gus? Shoot wi' that tell the time comes to use your gun. And the Major has got about as much mouth as you. Talk over the rough places, an' talk loud. Don't whisper; rip out a few damns an' then cut your caper. This is about the only chance you'll have to cuss the Major out wi'out gittin' hurt. I wisht I was in your shoes; I'd rake him up one side an' down the other. You can stand to be cussed out in a good cause, I reckon, Major."

"Yes—oh, yes! It'll make my flesh crawl, but I'll stand it like a baby."

"Don't narry one on you try to be too polite," said Mr. Sanders, and this was his parting injunction.

The two men were the length of the car apart when the Savannah train came to a standstill. "Perdue! they tell me that you have been hunting for me all over the city," said Mr. Tidwell. He was a trained speaker, and his voice had great carrying power. The firemen of both trains heard it distinctly, caught the note of passion in it and looked curiously out of their cabs.

"Yes, I've been hunting you, and now that I've found you you'll not get away until you apologise to me for the language you have used about me," cried Major Perdue. He was not as loud a talker as Mr. Tidwell, but his voice penetrated to every part of the building.

"What I've said I'll stand to," declared Mr. Tidwell, "and if you think I have been trying to keep out of your way, you will find out differently, you blustering

blackguard!" (The Major insisted afterward that Tidwell took advantage of the occasion to give his real views.)

"Are you ready, you cowardly hellian?" cried the Major, apparently in a rage.

"As ready as you will ever be," replied Tidwell hotly. He was the better actor of the two.

And then just as the prisoners were coming out of the coach—as soon as Gabriel, lean and haggard, had reached the floor of the station, Major Perdue whipped out his pistol and a shot rang out, clear and distinct, and it was immediately reproduced from the further end of the car by Mr. Tidwell, and then the shooting became a regular fusillade. There was a wild scattering on the part of the crowd assembled in the station, a scuffling, scurrying panic, and in the midst of it all Gabriel ducked his head, and made a rush with the rest. He had been handcuffed, but his wrist was nearly as large as his hand, and he had found early in his experience with these bracelets that by placing his thumb in the palm of his hand, he would have no difficulty in freeing himself from the irons. This he had accomplished without much trouble, as soon as he started out of the car, and when he ducked his head and ran, he had nothing to impede his movements.

And Gabriel was always swift of foot, as Cephas will tell you. On the present occasion, he brought all his strength, and energy, and will to bear on his efforts to escape. Running half-bent, he was afraid the crowd which he saw all about him, pushing and shoving, and

apparently making frantic efforts to escape, would give him some trouble. But strangely enough, this struggling crowd seemed to help him along. He saw men all around him with uniforms on, and wearing queerly shaped hats. They opened a way before him and closed in behind him. He heard a sharp cry, "Prisoner escaped!" and he heard the energetic commands of the officer in charge, but still the crowd opened a way in front of him, and closed up behind him. This pathway, formed of struggling firemen, led Gabriel away from the main entrance, and conducted him to the side, where there was an opening between the pillars. Not twenty feet away was the countryman with his queer-looking team. He was still complaining of the way he had been taken in by the town fellers who had told him that the station was a cotton warehouse.

Gabriel recognised the voice and ran toward it, jumped into the waggon, and crawled under the cover. "Now here—now here!" cried the countryman, "you kin rob me of my money, an' make a fool out'n me about your cotton warehouses, but be jigged ef I'll let you take my waggin an' team. I dunner what you're up to, but you'll have to git out'n my waggin." With that he stripped the cover from the top, and, lo! there was no one there!

He turned to the astonished crowd with open mouth. "Wher' in the nation did he go?" he cried. There was no answer to this, for the spectators were as much astonished as Mr. Sanders professed to be. The man who had crawled under the waggon-cover had disappeared.

He turned to the astonished crowd with a face on which amazement was depicted, crying out, "Now, you see, gentlemen, what honest men have to endyore when they come to your blame town. Whoever he is, an' wharsoever he may be, that chap ain't up to no good." Then he looked under the waggon and between the bales of cotton, and, finally, took the cover and shook it out, as if it might be possible for one of the "slick city fellers" to hide in any impossible place.

There was a tremendous uproar in the station, caused by the soldiers trying to run over the firemen and the efforts of the firemen to prevent them. In a short time, however, a squad of soldiers had forced themselves through the crowd, and as they made their appearance, Mr. Sanders gave the word to old Beck, saying as he moved off, "Ef you gents will excuse me, I'll mosey along, an' the next time I have a crap of cotton to sell, I'll waggin it to some place or other wher' w'arhouses ain't depots, an' wher' jugglers don't jump on you an' make the'r disappearance in broad daylight. This is my fust trip to this great town, an' it'll be my last ef I know myself, an' I ruther reckon I do."

As he spoke, his team was moving slowly off, and the soldiers who were in pursuit of Gabriel had no idea that it was worth their while to give the countryman and his superannuated equipment more than a passing glance. It was providential that Captain Falconer, who was to have conveyed the prisoners to Atlanta, should have been confined to his bed with an attack of malarial fever when the order for their removal came. The Captain would

surely have recognised the countryman as Mr. Sanders, and the probability is that Gabriel would have been recaptured, though Captain Buck Sanford, who was sitting in an upper window of the hotel, with his Winchester across his lap, says not.

The officer in charge did all that he could have been expected to do under the circumstances. By a stroke of good-luck, as he supposed, he found the Chief of Police near the entrance of the station and interested that official in his effort to recapture the prisoner who had escaped. By order of the military commander in Atlanta, the train was held a couple of hours while the search for Gabriel proceeded. The whole town was searched and researched, but all to no purpose. Gabriel had disappeared, and was not to be found by any person hostile to his interests.

Mr. Sanders drove his team around to the warehouse of Vardeman & Stark, where he was met by Colonel Tom Vardeman, who, besides being a cotton factor, was one of the political leaders of the day, and as popular a man as there was in the State.

"I heard a terrible fusillade in the direction of the depot," he said to Mr. Sanders, as the latter drove up. "I hope nobody's hurt."

"Well, they ain't much damage done, I reckon. Gus Tidwell an' Major Perdue took a notion to play a game of tag wi' pistols. They're doin' it jest for fun, I reckon. They want to show you city fellers that all the public sperrit an' enterprise ain't knocked out'n the country chaps."

"Well, they're almost certain to get in the lock-up," remarked Colonel Tom Vardeman.

"It reely looks that away," said Mr. Sanders, drily; "the Chief of Police was standin' in front of the depot, an' ev'ry time a gun'd go off he'd wink at me."

Colonel Tom laughed, and then turned to Mr. Sanders with a serious air. "What did I tell you about that wild plan of yours to rescue one of the prisoners? You've had all your trouble for nothing, and the probability is that you are out considerable cash first and last. You don't catch grown men asleep any more. Why, if the officer in charge of those poor boys were to permit one of them to escape, he'd be court-martialled, and it would serve him right."

"So it would," replied Mr. Sanders, "an' I'm mighty glad it wa'n't Captain Falconer. This feller that had the boys in tow is a stranger to me, an' I'm glad of it. He'll never know who lost him his job. He's a right nice-lookin' feller, too, but when he run out'n the depot awhile ago, his face kinder spoke up an' said he had had a dram too much some time endyorin' of the night; or his colour mought 'a' been high bekaze he was flurried or skeered. Now, then, Colonel Tom, ef you've done what you laid off to do, an' I don't misdoubt it in the least, you've got a safe place wher' I kin store a bale of long-staple cotton, ag'in a rise in prices. Ef you've got it fixed, I'll drive right in, bekaze the kind of cotton I'm dealin' in will spile ef it lays in the sun too long."

"Do you mean to tell me——"

"I'm mean enough for anything, Colonel Tom; but

right now, I want to git wher' I can drench a long-sufferin' friend of mine wi' a big gourdful of cold water."

"But, Mr. Sanders——"

"Ef you'd 'a' stuck in the William H., you'd 'a' purty nigh had my whole name," remarked Mr. Sanders with a solemn air.

"Why, dash it, man! you've taken my breath away. Drive right in there. John! Henry! come here, you lazy rascals, and take this team out! I told you," said Colonel Tom to Mr. Sanders as the negroes came forward, "that you couldn't get any better prices for your cotton than I offered you. We treat everybody right over here, and that's the way we keep our trade."

The two negroes were detailed to convey the mule and the oxen to the stable where Mr. Sanders had arranged for their "keep," as he termed it, and as soon as they were out of sight, Mr. Sanders went to the rear of the waggon, and said playfully, "Peep eye, Gabriel!" Receiving no answer, he was suddenly seized with the idea that the young man had suffocated behind the loose cotton which was intended to conceal him. But no such thing had happened. Gabriel had plenty of breathing-room, and the practical and unromantic rascal was sound asleep. His quarters were warm, but the sweat-boxes at Fort Pulaski were hotter. It was very fortunate for Gabriel that the reaction from the strain under which he had been, took the blessed shape of sleep.

Gabriel's place of concealment was simplicity itself. With his own hands Mr. Sanders had constructed a stout box of oak boards, and around this he had packed cotton

until the affair, when complete, had the appearance of an extra large bale of cotton, covered with bagging, and roped as the majority of cotton-bales were in those days. The only way to discover the sham was to pull out the cotton that concealed the opening in the end of the box. In delivering his message to Cephas, Mr. Sanders had called this loose cotton a plug, and the fact that the word was new to the vocabulary of the school-children gave great trouble to Gabriel, causing him to lose considerable sleep in the effort to translate it satisfactorily to himself. The meaning dawned on him one night when he had practically abandoned all hope of discovering it, and then the whole scheme became so clear to him that he could have shouted for joy.

It was thought that a search would be made for Gabriel in the neighbourhood of Shady Dale, and it was decided that it would be best for him to remain in the city until all noise of the pursuit had died away. But no pursuit was ever made, and it soon became apparent to the public at large that radicalism was burning itself out at last, after a weary time. When rage has nothing to feed upon it consumes itself, especially when various chronic maladies common to mankind take a hand in the game.

Not only was no pursuit made of Gabriel, but the detachment of Federal troops which had been stationed at Shady Dale was withdrawn. The young men who had been arrested with Gabriel were placed on trial before a military court, but with the connivance of counsel for the prosecution, the trial dragged along until the mili-

tary commander issued a proclamation announcing that civil government had been restored in the State, and the prisoners were turned over to the State courts. And as there was not the shadow of a case against them, they were never brought to trial, a fact which caused some one to suggest to Mr. Sanders that all his work in behalf of Gabriel had been useless.

"Well, it didn't do Gabriel no good, maybe," remarked the veteran, "but it holp me up mightily. It gi' me somethin' to think about, an' it holp me acrosst some mighty rough places. You have to pass the time away anyhow, an' what better way is they than workin' for them you like? Why, I knowed a gal, an' a mighty fine one she was, who knit socks for a feller she had took a fancy to. The feller died, but she went right ahead wi' her knittin' just the same. Now, that didn't do the feller a mite of good, but it holp the gal up might'ly."

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Gabriel as an Orator

THE *Malvern Recorder* was very kind to Gabriel, and said nothing in regard to his escape. This was due to a timely suggestion on the part of Colonel Tom Vardeman, who rightly guessed that the Government authorities would be more willing to permit the affair to blow over, provided the details were not made notorious in the newspapers. As the result of the Colonel's discretion, there was not a hint in the public press that one of the prisoners had eluded the vigilance of those who had charge of him. There was a paragraph or two in the *Recorder*, stating that the Shady Dale prisoners—"the victims of Federal tyranny"—had passed through the city on their way to Atlanta, and a long account was given of their sufferings in Fort Pulaski. The facts were supplied by Gabriel, but the printed account went far beyond anything he had said. "They are not the first martyrs that have suffered in the cause of liberty," said the editor of the *Recorder*, in commenting on the account in the local columns, "and they will not be the last. Let the radicals do their worst; on the old red hills of Georgia, the camp-fires of Democracy have been kindled, and they will continue to burn and blaze long

after the tyrants and corruptionists have been driven from power."

Gabriel read this eloquent declaration somewhat uneasily. There was something in it, and something in the exaggeration of the facts that he had given to the representative of the paper that jarred upon him. He had already in his own mind separated the Government and its real interests from the selfish aims and desires of those who were temporarily clothed with authority, and he had begun to suspect that there might also be something selfish behind the utterances of those who made such vigorous protests against tyranny. The matter is hardly worth referring to in these days when shams and humbugs appear before the public in all their nakedness; but it was worth a great deal to Gabriel to be able to suspect that the champions of constitutional liberty, and the defenders of popular rights, in the great majority of instances had their eyes on the flesh-pots. The suspicions he entertained put him on his guard at a time when he was in danger of falling a victim to the rhetoric of orators and editors, and they preserved him from many a mistaken belief.

During the period that intervened between his escape and the announcement of the restoration of civil government in Georgia, Gabriel settled down to a course of reading in the law office of Judge Vardeman, Colonel Tom's brother. He did this on the advice of those who were old enough to know that idleness does not agree with a healthy youngster, especially in a large city. His experience in Judge Vardeman's office decided his career.

He was fascinated from the very beginning. He found the dullest law-book interesting; and he became so absorbed in his reading that the genial Judge was obliged to warn him that too much study was sometimes as bad as none.

Yet the lad's appetite grew by what it fed on. A new field had been opened up to him, and he entered it with delight. Here was what he had been longing for, and there were moments when he felt sure that he had heard delivered from the bench, or had dreamed, the grave and sober maxims and precepts that confronted him on the printed page. He pursued his studies in a state of exaltation that caused the days to fly by unnoted. He thought of home, and of his grandmother, and a vision of Nan sometimes disturbed his slumbers; but for the time being there was nothing real but the grim commentators and expounders of the common law.

When Mr. Sanders returned home, bearing the news of Gabriel's escape, Nan Dorrington laid siege to his patience, and insisted that he go over every detail of the event, not once but a dozen times. To her it was a remarkable adventure, which fitted in well with the romances which she had been weaving all her life. How did Gabriel look when he ran from the depot at Malvern? Was he frightened? And how in the world did he manage to get in the waggon, and crawl on the inside of the sham bale of cotton and hide so that nobody could see him? And what did he say and how did he look when Mr. Sanders found him asleep in the cotton-bale box, or the cotton-box bale, whichever you might call it?

"Why, honey, I've told you all I know an' a whole lot more," protested Mr. Sanders. "Ef ever'body was name Nan, I'd be the most populous man in the whole county."

"Well, tell me this," Nan insisted; "what did he talk about when he woke up? Did he ask about any of the home-folks?"

"Lemme see," said Mr. Sanders, pretending to reflect; "he turned over in his box, an' got his ha'r ketched in a rough plank, an' then he bust out cryin' jest like you use to do when you got hurt. I kinder muched him up, an' then he up an' tol' me a whole lot of stuff about a young lady: how he was gwine to win her ef he had to stop chawin' tobacco, an' cussin'. I'll name no names, bekaze I promised him I wouldn't."

"I think that is disgusting," Nan declared. "Do you mean to tell me he never asked about his grandmother?"

"Fiddlesticks, Nan! he looked at me like he was hungry, an' I told him all about his grandmother, an' he kep' on a-lookin' hungry, an' I told him all about her neighbours. What he said I couldn't tell you no more than the man in the moon. He done jest like any other healthy boy would 'a' done, an' that's all I know about it."

"That's what I thought," said Nan wearily; "boys are so tiresome!"

"Well, Gabriel didn't look much like a boy when I seed him last. He hadn't shaved in a month of Sundays, and his beard was purty nigh as long as my little

finger. He couldn't go to a barber-shop in Malvern for fear some of the niggers might know him an' report him to the commander of the post there. I begged him not to shave the beard off. He looks mighty well wi' it."

"His beard!" cried Nan. "If he comes home with a beard I'll never speak to him again. Gabriel with a beard! It is too ridiculous!"

"Don't worry," Mr. Sanders remarked soothingly. "Ef I git word of his comin' I'll git me a pa'r of shears, an' meet him outside the corporation line, an' lop his whiskers off for him; but I tell you now, it won't make him look a bit purtier—not a bit."

"You needn't trouble yourself," said Nan, with considerable dignity. "I have no interest in the matter at all."

"Well, I thought maybe you'd be glad to git Gabriel's beard an' make it in a sofy pillow."

"Why, whoever heard of such a thing?" cried Nan. In common with many others, she was not always sure when Mr. Sanders was to be taken seriously.

"I knowed a man once," replied Mr. Sanders, by way of making a practical application of his suggestion, "that vowed he'd never shave his beard off till Henry Clay was elected President. Well, it growed an' growed, an' bimeby it got so long that he had to wrop it around his body a time or two for to keep it from draggin' the ground. It went on that away for a considerbul spell, till one day, whilst he was takin' a nap, his wife took her scissors an' whacked it off. The reason she give was that she wanted to make four or five sofy pillows; but

I heard afterwards that she changed her mind, an' made a good big mattress."

Nan looked hard at the solemn countenance of Mr. Sanders, trying to discover whether he was in earnest, but older and wiser eyes than hers had often failed to penetrate behind the veil of childlike serenity that sometimes clothed his features.

One day while Gabriel was deep in a law-book, Colonel Tom Vardeman came in smiling. He had a telegram in his hand, which he tossed to Gabriel. It was from Major Tomlin Perdue, and contained an urgent request for Gabriel to take the next train for Halcyondale, where he would meet the prisoners who had been released pending their trial by the State courts, an event that never came off. Gabriel had seen in the morning paper that the prisoners were to be released in a day or two; but undoubtedly Major Perdue had the latest information, for he was in communication with Meriwether Clopton and other friends of the prisoners who were in Atlanta watching the progress of the case.

Gabriel lost no time in making his arrangements to leave, and he was in Halcyondale some hours before the Atlanta train was due. When all had arrived, they were for going home at once; but the citizens of Halcyondale, led by Major Perdue and Colonel Blasengame, would not hear of such a thing.

"No, sirs!" exclaimed Major Perdue. "You young ones have been away from home long enough to be weaned, and a day or two won't make any difference to anybody's feelings. We have long been wanting a red-

letter day in this section, and now that we've got the excuse for making one, we're not going to let it go by. Everything is fixed, or will be by day after to-morrow. We're going to have a barbecue half-way between this town and Shady Dale. The time was ripe for it anyhow, and you fellows make it more binding. The people of the two counties haven't had a jollification since the war, and they couldn't have one while it was going on. They haven't had an excuse for it; and now that we have the excuse we're not going to turn it loose until the jollification is over."

And so it was arranged. Notice was given to the people in the old-fashioned way, and nearly everybody in the two counties not only contributed something to the barbecue, but came to enjoy it, and when they were assembled they made up the largest crowd that had been seen together in that section since the day when Alexander Stephens and Judge Cone had their famous debate—a debate which finally ended in a personal encounter between the two.

The details of the barbecue were in the hands of Mr. Sanders, who was famous in those days for his skill in such matters. The fires had been lighted the night before, and when the sun rose, long lines of carcasses were slowly roasting over the red coals, contributing to the breezes an aroma so persistent and penetrating that it could be recognised miles away, and so delicious that, as Mr. Sanders remarked, "it would make a sick man's mouth water."

A speaker's stand had been erected, and everything

was arranged just as it would have been for a political meeting. There was a good deal of formality too. Major Perdue prided himself on doing such things in style. He was a great hand to preside at political meetings, in which there is considerable formality. As the Major managed the affair, the friends of the young men caught their first glimpse of them as they went upon the stand. By some accident, or it may have been arranged by Major Perdue, Gabriel was the first to make his appearance, but he was closely followed by the rest. A tremendous shout went up from the immense audience, which was assembled in front of the stand, and this was what the Major had arranged for. The shouts and cheers of a great assemblage were as music in his ears. He comported himself with as much pride as if all the applause were a tribute to him. He advanced to the front, and stood drinking it in greedily, not because he was a vain man, but because he was fond of the excitement with which the presence of a crowd inspired him. It made his blood tingle; it warmed him as a glass of spiced wine warms a sick person.

When the applause had subsided, the Major made quite a little speech, in which he referred to the spirit of martyrdom betrayed by the young patriots, who had been seized and carried into captivity by the strong hand of a tyrannical Government, and he managed to stir the crowd to a great pitch of excitement. He brought his remarks to a close by introducing his young friend, Gabriel Tolliver.

There was tremendous cheering at this, and all of a

sudden Gabriel woke up to the fact that his name had been called, and he looked around with a dazed expression on his face. He had been trying to see if he could find the face of Nan Dorrington in the crowd, but so far he had failed, and he woke out of a dream to hear a multitude of voices shouting his name. "Why, what do they mean?" he asked.

"Get up there and face 'em," said Major Perdue.

Now, Nan was not so very far from the stand, so close, indeed, that she had not been in Gabriel's field of vision while he was sitting down; but when he rose to his feet she was the first person he saw, and he observed that she was very pale. In fact, Nan had shrunk back when the Major announced that Gabriel would speak for his fellow-martyrs, and for a moment or two she fairly hated the man. She might not be very fond of Gabriel, but she didn't want to see him made a fool of before so many people.

Somehow or other, the young fellow divined her thought, and he smiled in spite of himself. He had no notion what to say, but he had the gift of saying something, very strongly developed in him; and he knew the moment he saw Nan's scared face that he must acquit himself with credit. So he looked at her and smiled, and she tried to smile in return, but it was a very pitiful little smile. Gabriel walked to the small table and leaned one hand on it, and his composure was so reassuring to everybody but Nan, that the cheering was renewed and kept up while the youngster was trying to put his poor thoughts together.

He began by thanking Major Perdue for his sympathetic remarks, and then proceeded to take sharp issue with the whole spirit of the Major's speech, using as the basis of his address an idea that had been put into his head by Judge Vardeman. The day before he left Malvern, the Judge had asked him this question: "Why should a parcel of politicians turn us against a Government under which we are compelled to live?"

This was the basis of Gabriel's remarks. He elaborated it, and was perhaps the first person in the country to ask if there was any Confederate soldier who had feelings of hatred against the soldiers of the Union. He had not gone far before he had the audience completely under his control. Almost every statement he made was received with shouts of approval, and in some instances the applause was such that he had time to stand and gaze at Nan, whose colour had returned, and who occasionally waved the little patch of lace-bordered muslin that she called a handkerchief.

She was almost frightened at Gabriel's composure. The last time she had seen him, he was an awkward young man, whose hands and feet were always in his way. She felt that she was his superior then; but how would she feel in the presence of this grave young man, who was as composed while addressing an immense crowd as if he had been talking to Cephas, and who was dealing out advice to his seniors right and left? Nan was very sure in her own mind that she would never understand Gabriel again, and the thought robbed the occasion of a part of its enjoyment. She allowed her thoughts to wander to

such an extent that she forgot the speech, and had her mind recalled to it only when the frantic screams of the audience split her ears, and she saw Gabriel, flushed and triumphant, returning to his seat. Then the real nature of his triumph dawned on her, as she saw Meriwether Clopton and all the others on the stand crowding around Gabriel and shaking his hand. She sat very quiet and subdued until she felt some one touch her shoulder. It was Cephas, and he wanted to know what she thought of it all. Wasn't it splendiferous?

Nan made no reply, but gave the little lad a message for Gabriel, which he delivered with promptness. He edged his way through the crowd, crawled upon the stand, and pulled at Gabriel's coat-tails. The great orator—that's what Cephas thought he was—seized the little fellow and hugged him before all the crowd; and though many years have passed, Cephas has never had a triumph of any kind that was quite equal to the pride he felt while Gabriel held him in his arms. The little fellow took this occasion to deliver his message, which was to the effect that Gabriel was to ride home in the Dorrington carriage with Nan.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Nan Surrenders

IT was all over at last, and Gabriel found himself seated in the carriage, side by side with the demurest and the quietest young lady he had ever seen. He had shaken hands until his arm was sore, and he had hunted for Nan everywhere; and finally, when he had given up the search, he heard her calling him and saw her beckoning him from a carriage. There was not much of a greeting between them, and he saw at once that, while this was the Nan he had known all his life, she had changed greatly. What he didn't know was that the change had taken place while he was in the midst of his speech. She was just as beautiful as ever; in fact, her loveliness seemed to be enhanced by some new light in her eyes—or was it the way her head drooped?—or a touch of new-born humility in her attitude? Whatever it was, Gabriel found it very charming.

To his surprise, he found himself quite at ease in her presence. The change, if it could be called such, had given him an advantage. "You used to be afraid of me, Gabriel," said Nan, "and now I am afraid of you. No, not afraid; you know what I mean," she explained.

"If I thought you were afraid of me, Nan, I'd get

out of the carriage and walk home," and then, as the carriage rolled and rocked along the firm clay road, Gabriel sat and watched her, studying her face whenever he had an opportunity. Neither seemed to have any desire to talk. Gabriel had forgotten all about his sufferings in the sweat-boxes of Fort Pulaski; but those experiences had left an indelible mark on his character, and on his features. They had strengthened him every way—strengthened and subdued him. He was the same Gabriel, and yet there was a difference, and this difference appealed to Nan in a way that astonished her. She sat in the carriage perfectly happy, and yet she felt that a good cry would help her wonderfully.

"I had something I wanted to say to you, Nan," he remarked after awhile. "I've wanted to say it for a long time. But, honestly, I'm afraid——"

"Don't say you are afraid, Gabriel. You used to be afraid; but now I'm the one to be afraid. I mean I should be afraid, but I'm not."

"I was feeling very bold when I was mouthing to those people; and every time I looked into your eyes, I said to myself, 'You are mine; you are mine! and you know it!' And I thought all the time that you could hear me. It was a very queer impression. Please don't make fun of me to-day; wait till to-morrow."

"I couldn't hear you," said Nan, "but I could feel what you said."

"That was why you were looking so uneasy," remarked Gabriel. "Perhaps you were angry, too."

"No, I was very happy. I didn't hear your speech,

but I knew from the actions of the people around me that it was a good one. But, somehow, I couldn't hear it. I was thinking of other things. Did you think I was bold to send for you?"

"Why, I was coming to you anyway," said Gabriel.

"Well, if you hadn't I should have come to you," said Nan with a sigh. "Since I received your letter, I haven't been myself any more."

"Did I send you a letter?" asked Gabriel.

"No; you wrote part of one," answered Nan. "But that was enough. I found it among your papers. And then when I heard you had been arrested—well, it is all a dream to me. I didn't know before that one could be perfectly happy and completely miserable at the same time."

Then, for the first time since he had entered the carriage she looked at him. Her eyes met his, and—well, nothing more was said for some time. Nan had as much as she could do to straighten her hat, and get her hair smoothed out as it should be, so that people wouldn't know that she and Gabriel were engaged. That was what she said, and she was so cute and lovely, so sweet and gentle that Gabriel threatened to crush the hat and get the hair out of order again. And they were very happy.

When they arrived at Shady Dale, Gabriel insisted that Nan go home with him, and he gave what seemed to the young woman a very good reason. "You know, Nan, my grandmother has been Bethuning me every time I mentioned your name, and I have heard her Bethuning

you. We'll just go in hand in hand and tell her the facts in the case."

"Hand in hand, Gabriel? Wouldn't she think I was very bold?"

"No, Nan," replied Gabriel, very emphatically. "There are two things my grandmother believes in. She believes in her Bible, and she believes in love."

"And she believes in you, Gabriel. Oh, if you only knew how much she loves you!" cried Nan.

They didn't go in to the dear old lady hand in hand, for when they reached the Lumsden Place, they found Miss Polly Gaither there, and they interrupted her right in the midst of some very interesting gossip. Miss Polly, after greeting Gabriel as cordially as her lonely nature would permit, looked at Nan very critically. There was a question in her eyes, and Nan answered it with a blush.

"I thought as much," said Miss Polly, oracularly. "I declare I believe there's an epidemic in the town. There's Pulaski Tomlin, Silas Tomlin, Paul Tomlin, and now Gabriel Tolliver. Well, I wish them well, especially you, Gabriel. Nan is a little frivolous now, but she'll settle down."

"She isn't frivolous," said Gabriel, speaking in the ear-trumpet; "she is simply young."

"Is that the trouble?" inquired Miss Polly, with a smile, "well, she'll soon recover from that." And then she turned to Gabriel's grandmother, and took up the thread of her gossip where it had been broken by the arrival of Nan and Gabriel.

"I declare, Lucy, if anybody had told me, and I

couldn't see for myself, I never would have believed it. Why, Silas Tomlin is a changed man. He looks better than he did twenty-five years ago. He goes about smiling, and while he isn't handsome—he never could be handsome, you know—he is very pleasant-looking. Yes, he is a changed man. He was going into the house just now as I came out, and he stopped and shook hands with me, and asked about my health, something he never did before. Honestly I don't know what to make of it; I'm clean put out. Why, the man had two or three quarrels with Ritta Claiborne when she first came here, and now he is going to marry her, or she him—I don't know which one did the courting, but I'll never believe it was old Silas. I am really and truly sorry for Ritta Claiborne. We who know Silas Tomlin better than she does ought to warn her of the step she is about to take. I have been on the point of doing so several times; but really, Lucy, I haven't the heart. She is one of the finest characters I ever knew—she is perfectly lovely. She is all heart, and I am afraid Silas Tomlin has imposed on her in some way. But she is perfectly happy, and so is Silas. If I thought such a thing was possible, I'd say they were very much in love with each other."

"Possible!" cried Gabriel's grandmother; "why, love is the only thing worth thinking about in this world. Even the Old Testament is full of it, and there is hardly anything else in the New Testament. Read it, Polly, and you'll find that all the sacrifice and devotion are based on love—real love, and unselfish because it is real."

"It may be so, Lucy; I'll not deny it," and then, after some more gossip less interesting, Miss Polly Gaither

took her leave, saying, "I'll leave you with your grandchildren, Lucy."

When she was gone, Gabriel stood up and beckoned to Nan, and she went to him without a word. He placed his arm around her, and then called the attention of his grandmother.

"You've been Bethuning Nan and me for ever so long, grandmother: what do you think of this?"

"Why, I think it is very pretty, if it is real. I have known it all along; I mean since the night you were carried away. Nan told me."

"Why, Grandmother Lumsden! I never said a word to you about it; I wouldn't have dared."

"I knew it when you came in the door that day—the day that Meriwether Clopton was here. Do you suppose I would have sat by you on the sofa, and held your hand if I had not known it?"

"I'm glad you knew it," said Nan. "I wanted you to know it, but I didn't dare to tell you in so many words. I am going home now, Gabriel, and you mustn't call on me to-day or to-night. I want to be alone. I am so happy," she said to Mrs. Lumsden, as she kissed her, "that I don't want to talk to any one, not even to Gabriel."

And this was Gabriel's thought too. He saw none of his friends that day, and when night fell he went out to the old Bermuda hill, and lay upon the warm damp grass, the happiest person in the world.

THE END

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